SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

AT ST. MARY'S CHURCH,

IN THE YEAR MDCCXCVIII,

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY

THE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M. A.

BY THE

REV. CHARLES HENRY HALL, B. D.

CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,

AND

LATE STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH.

OXFORD:

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR THE AUTHOR;

AND SOLD BY HANWELL AND PARKER, AND J. COOKE;

F. AND C. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,

AND HATCHARD, PICCADILLY, LONDON.

1799.

SERMONS

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD,

BY THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

WILLIAM LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,

IN ST. MARY'S CHURCH,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, JULY 7, 1811,

AT THE

LECTURE

FOUNDED BY

THE REV. JOHN BAMPTON, M.A.

CANON OF SALISBURY.

FOLLOWING DISCOURSES,

BY THE

REV. CHARLES HENRY HALL, D.D.

CHAPLAIN TO THE LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,

BY HIS APPOINTMENT,

LATE STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH,

AND AFFECTIONATE SCHOLAR OF THE AUTHOR.

OXFORD:

AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS FOR THE AUTHOR;

AND SOLD BY MANNERS AND MILLER, EDINBURGH;

R. AND J. RIVINGTON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,

AND HATCHARD, PICCADILLY, LONDON.

1811.

TO

THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,

HENRY REGINALD,

LORD BISHOP OF EXETER,

THE

FOLLOWING DISCOURSES

ARE RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS OBLIGED,

AND AFFECTIONATE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

IT is the purpose of the following Discourses to consider at large, what is meant by the Scriptural expression, "Fulness of Time;" or, in other words, to point out the previous steps, by which God Almighty gradually prepared the way, for the introduction and promulgation of the Gospel. In such a design, there is little to awaken the attention of the learned Theologian; and, in fact, the Author has only attempted to bring under one view, and to render generally intelligible, topics and arguments which in the writings of our best and ablest Divines have long ago been separately and thoroughly investigated.

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

IT is the purpoſe of the following Diſcourſes to conſider at large, what is meant by the Scriptural expreſſion, "Fulneſs of Time;" or, in other words, to point out the previous ſteps, by which God Almighty gradually prepared the way, for the introduction and promulgation of the Goſpel. In ſuch a deſign, there is little to awaken the attention of the learned Theologian; and, in fact, the Author has only attempted to bring under one view, and to render generally intelligible, topics and arguments, which in the writings of our beſt and ableſt Divines have long ago been ſeparately and thoroughly inveſtigated.

EXTRACT

FROM THE

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

OF THE LATE

REV. JOHN BAMPTON,

CANON OF SALISBURY.

——" I give and bequeath my Lands " and Eſtates to the Chancellor, Maſters, " and Scholars of the Univerſity of Ox- " ford for ever, to have and to hold all " ſingular and the ſaid Lands or Eſtates " upon truſt, and to the intents and pur- " poſes hereinafter mentioned; that is to " ſay, I will and appoint that the Vice- " Chancellor of the Univerſity of Oxford

" for

" for the time being ſhall take and receive
" all the rents, iſſues, and profits thereof,
" and (after all taxes, reparations, and ne-
" ceſſary deductions made) that he pay
" all the remainder to the endowment of
" eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, to be
" eſtabliſhed for ever in the ſaid Univer-
" ſity, and to be performed in the man-
" ner following:

" I direct and appoint, that, upon the
" firſt Tueſday in Eaſter Term, a Lec-
" turer be yearly choſen by the Heads of
" Colleges only, and by no others, in the
" room adjoining to the Printing-Houſe,
" between the hours of ten in the morn-
" ing and two in the afternoon, to preach
" eight Divinity Lecture Sermons, the year
" following, at St. Mary's in Oxford, be-
" tween the commencement of the laſt
" month in Lent Term, and the end of
" the third week in Act Term.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that the
" eight Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be

" preached

" preached upon either of the following " ſubjects—to confirm and eſtabliſh the " Chriſtian Faith, and to confute all here- " tics and ſchiſmatics—upon the divine " authority of the Holy Scriptures—upon " the authority of the writings of the " primitive Fathers, as to the faith and " practice of the primitive Church—upon " the Divinity of our Lord and Saviour " Jeſus Chriſt—upon the Divinity of the " Holy Ghoſt—upon the Articles of the " Chriſtian Faith, as comprehended in the " Apoſtles' and Nicene Creeds.

" Alſo I direct, that thirty copies of the " eight Divinity Lecture Sermons ſhall be " always printed, within two months af- " ter they are preached, and one copy " ſhall be given to the Chancellor of the " Univerſity, and one copy to the Head " of every College, and one copy to the " Mayor of the city of Oxford, and one " copy to be put into the Bodleian Li- " brary; and the expence of printing them

" ſhall

" ſhall be paid out of the revenue of the
" Land or Eſtates given for eſtabliſhing
" the Divinity Lecture Sermons; and the
" Preacher ſhall not be paid, nor be en-
" titled to the revenue, before they are
" printed.

" Alſo I direct and appoint, that no
" perſon ſhall be qualified to preach the
" Divinity Lecture Sermons, unleſs he
" hath taken the Degree of Maſter of Arts
" at leaſt, in one of the two Univerſities
" of Oxford or Cambridge; and that the
" ſame perſon ſhall never preach the Di-
" vinity Lecture Sermons twice."

SERMON I.

ACTS i. 7.

AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW THE TIMES, OR THE SEASONS, WHICH THE FATHER HATH PUT INTO HIS OWN POWER.

SUCH was the rebuke with which our bleſſed Lord repreſſed the curioſity of his diſciples, when, after he had riſen from the dead, and had appeared in their aſſembly at Jeruſalem, they eagerly enquired, whether they were at that time to look for the redemption of Iſrael. "Lord, wilt thou at this [a] time reſtore again the

[a] Acts i. 6.

kingdom to Iſrael?" As yet they were far from the truth; neither the works which they had ſeen, nor the continual appeal which they had heard to their own Prophetical Hiſtories, had prevailed over the habitual prejudices and prepoſſeſſions, which they entertained in common with the reſt of their countrymen. They expected to be the conquerors of the world; and, being accuſtomed, like their brethren, to indulge viſionary ſchemes of power and dominion, until they had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, even the Apoſtles of our Lord ſeem to have formed no idea of a ſpiritual kingdom, or a deliverance from the ſlavery of ſin.

A life of humiliation and a diſgraceful death, were not the characters by which the Jewiſh nation had hoped to recognize their promiſed Deliverer: with expectations of a very different nature, they had framed a ſyſtem of their own, calculated to ſooth their national vanity, and to ſatisfy their luſt of power: and their attachment to this fondly cheriſhed ſyſtem is of itſelf ſufficient to account for their determined rejec-

rejection of another ſo directly contradictory to it—a ſyſtem, which, inſtead of flattering their ambition by the proſpect of extenſive conqueſts, inculcated the duty of ſubmiſſion to their preſent rulers; and, far from gratifying their pride by promiſing them excluſive privileges as the favourites of God, avowedly declared, that every nation under heaven was to be admitted to a participation of its bleſſings. Had it not been for this national prepoſſeſſion, which their corrupt paſſions and profligate morals contributed to ſtrengthen and confirm, it is not eaſy to conceive how the Jews could have failed to obſerve the connexion between the Religion of Chriſt and their own Law; a connexion, which all their Prophets had taught them to expect; which our Saviour himſelf, at the very commencement of his miniſtry, expreſsly pointed out to them: "Think not," ſaid he, "that I am come to deſtroy the Law or the Prophets: I am not come to deſtroy, but to fulfil [b]:" and which the Apoſtles afterwards explained, not to be an acci-

[b] Matt. v. 17.

dental coincidence, or a fanciful analogy, but the neceſſary dependence of an imperfect preparatory law upon that which completes it.

We at this day, it is true, have many other proofs of the divine origin of our religion. We have to urge its rapid progreſs, by the miniſtry of perſons to all appearance utterly incapable of producing ſo extraordinary an effect, and its final eſtabliſhment, in defiance of the prejudices, the artifices, and the power both of the Jew and the Gentile. But we can produce no argument more forcible, or more convincing, than that which ariſes from a view of the dependence of Chriſtianity, not only upon the Law of Moſes, but in a more extended ſenſe upon the belief and expectations of the Patriarchs, and upon every former diſcovery of his will, which God had vouchſafed to make to man.

To draw this argument out at length, to view it in all its parts, and to give it all the force of which it is capable, will be the purpoſe of the enſuing Lectures;—in the

the courſe of which I ſhall attempt to ſhew, that the whole of God's moral government of the world, and all the complicated events in the hiſtory of mankind, were, in fact, nothing more than a preparation, under the guidance and control of his Providence, for the introduction of the *Chriſtian Religion*; "the myſtery ordained before the world [c]," "hidden from ages and generations [d]," and by the mercy of God made manifeſt at laſt.

God himſelf gave the firſt intimation of his gracious deſign: he announced to our firſt parents, after their fall from a ſtate of innocence, that the "ſeed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the head of the ſerpent [e]." To Abraham, to Iſaac, and to Jacob, he repeated the ſame promiſe of a ſpiritual deliverance, connected with the grant of worldly bleſſings and temporal proſperity; and, when in proceſs of time the deſcendants of the patriarchal family were become a flouriſhing and populous nation,

[c] 1 Cor. ii. 7.
[d] Coloſſ. i. 26.
[e] Gen. iii. 15.

a ſucceſſion of inſpired Prophets kept alive the remembrance of the original promiſe, and delineated in brighter colours the nature of the deliverance to which it pointed, and the character of the perſon by whom it was to be accompliſhed.

Thus the great ſcheme of Providence was gradually developed, till the "fulneſs of time arrived," in which "God, who before had ſpoken at ſundry times and in divers manners to the fallen race of man, thought fit at laſt to ſpeak to them by his Son[f]."

I am aware that there always have been, and that there ſtill are, many unbelievers, who cannot diſcover the wiſdom of God in the progreſſive communication of truth; who aſk with great boldneſs, and with ſome ſemblance perhaps of reaſon, if the knowledge of Chriſtianity be neceſſary to the happineſs of mankind, why were ſo many generations ſuffered to paſs away without it? Why were its ſaving doctrines

[f] Heb. i. 1.

conveyed

conveyed in dark hints, and obſcure alluſions? And would it not have been more conſiſtent with the juſtice of God, to have revealed the truth fully and clearly at once, without the tedious and circuitous method of a preparatory diſpenſation?

Such objections as theſe, however plauſible they may at firſt ſight appear, are founded in ignorance both of the nature of man, and the ways of God; in narrow and partial views of his general Providence, and in miſtaken notions of the character and deſign of Chriſtianity.

Whether ſuch a revelation as that made by Jeſus Chriſt was, or was not, neceſſary, can beſt be determined by conſidering the actual ſtate of moral and religious knowledge at the time of its promulgation. And, without entering fully into that ſubject at preſent, it may be ſufficient for our purpoſe to aſk, whether there was not in thoſe days, upon all the great queſtions which involve the happineſs of man, an endleſs variety of diſcordant hypotheſes? Was not the providence of God, his juſ-

tice, nay, his very exiſtence, the theme of diſpute and diſcuſſion in the ſchools of Philoſophy? Was not the immortality of the ſoul conteſted by ſome, and openly denied by others? And were not the duties of morality imperfectly underſtood, and the boundaries of right and wrong inaccurately defined?

But it is not my intention to enlarge upon theſe topics at preſent; I reſerve them for fuller diſcuſſion hereafter, and I am content to reſt the neceſſity of the Chriſtian Revelation ſimply upon the want of certain knowledge with reſpect to a future life.

It will ſcarcely be denied, except it be by thoſe who in the pride of human reaſon diſdain the control of an omniſcient God, the Creator, Governor, and Judge of mankind, and give us in his ſtead a Being of their own creation — except it be by ſuch, it will ſcarcely at this time be denied, that the certainty of a future life, and a future ſtate of retribution, is the vital principle of all religion and all virtue. Take away the

hope

hope of a future exiſtence, and we loſe all proper motives for piety to God, or benevolence to man. What can ſupport us amidſt the unequal diſpenſations of this life, or give us fortitude to endure its diſappointments, its difficulties, and its ſorrows, but the aſſurance of future recompence? And what can induce us to reſiſt the impulſe of paſſion, and the importunate cravings of appetite, if, when this tranſitory ſcene is cloſed, we are to go, without the fear of puniſhment, or the hope of reward, to the everlaſting home of the ancient Epicurean, or the eternal ſleep of the modern Atheiſt?

If then the knowledge, not only of a future ſtate of exiſtence, but a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, be indiſpenſably neceſſary to our happineſs, do we know of any ſyſtem of religion, that expreſsly promiſed ſuch a ſtate to us, before the Goſpel had brought life and immortality to light? If the promiſe had been given any where, we ſhould naturally expect to find it in Judaiſm, a religion unqueſtionably from heaven: but there it is not

not—the promiſe of eternal life is not amongſt the rewards of the Moſaic Law[g]: the favoured agent of God is empowered to enforce his decrees by the promiſe of temporal proſperity in caſe of obedience, and the denunciation of dreadful viſitations, of plagues, famine, and deſolation, in caſe of diſobedience: but of future rewards, or future puniſhments, no mention is made.

Doubtleſs under the Law, as under every other diſpenſation, holy and virtuous men, either by their own reflections, or by the eſpecial grace of God imparted to them, were led to expect another ſtate, which would account for the evils and the diſorders of the preſent. The holy Scriptures abound with paſſages, which will ſcarcely admit of any other interpretation[h]: and it is certainly reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that the opinions of good and pious men upon ſuch a ſubject would influence in a great degree the popular belief: but we are not to

[g] Bp. Bull's Harmonia Apoſtolica, Diſſ. Poſt. Chap. X.

[h] See the paſſages cited by Jortin in his Diſſertation on a Future State.

con-

conclude from thence, that the notion of a future ſtate was either generally admitted, or accurately underſtood.

Of the two great ſects who led the Synagogues, one openly denied the poſſibility of a reſurrection; and the other, although it allowed that a departed ſoul might reanimate another body, was far from imagining that the ſame perſon would riſe again from the grave, to account for the works done in the body, and to receive reward or puniſhment.

What the Almighty did not think fit clearly and explicitly to reveal to his choſen people, it would be in vain to aſk of thoſe who were left to the guidance of their own unaſſiſted reaſon. Political ſecurity was the great object of Gentile religion, ſo that whilſt expiatory ſacrifices, luſtrations, and coſtly offerings were allowed to be a ſufficient atonement for the vices of the opulent, the idea of futurity was blended with fable and allegory, to amuſe the idle, and with abſurd terrors and fanciful puniſhments, to terrify the vulgar. The ſtateſ-

man

man derided in ſecret what he publicly ſanctioned; and even they who could not but indulge the pleaſing hope of immortality, even the beſt and wiſeſt amongſt them, ſeem rather to have cheriſhed the idea with a fond and anxious wiſh that it might be realized, than with any thing like conviction or certainty that it would be ſo.

Since then neither the light of reaſon, nor the light of revelation, afforded any certainty upon this important point, nothing at beſt but a hope and a perſuaſion; ſince the natural law written in the heart of man was only to be diſcovered by the labour of the virtuous few, and even they acknowledged its inefficacy; whilſt the generality of mankind were given up to the groſs errors of popular ſuperſtition and idolatrous worſhip, living in the world without the knowledge of God, or the expectation of futurity; it cannot ſurely at this time be doubted whether a more explicit revelation was neceſſary. Ought we not rather to offer up continual thanks to God, for having poured down upon us

the

the glorious light of his Goſpel, for having in his good time revealed even unto babes what was ſo long "hidden from the wiſe and prudent[1];" for having given us, not the hope or expectation merely, but the aſſurance of happineſs, and having made us, not the believers only, but the heirs of immortality.

But if it be granted that no prior knowledge ſuperſeded the uſe of a more explicit revelation, and that upon this ground Chriſtianity was neceſſary, then the other parts of the objection are preſſed upon us with greater force—Why was the communication of truths ſo eſſential to our happineſs ſo long delayed? Where was the neceſſity for a preparatory diſpenſation? And why is not the light of the Goſpel at this day impartially diffuſed over the whole race of mankind.

In reply to queſtions of this ſort, it would perhaps be ſufficient ſimply to plead our

[1] Matt. xi. 25. Luke x. 21.

ig-

ignorance of the counſels of God: "it is not for us to know the times, or the ſeaſons, which the Father hath put into his own power[k]." Our ignorance of the motives and the cauſes, which God hath choſen to conceal from our view, is ſo very obvious, every occurrence of common life, and every phenomenon of nature, ſo unqueſtionably prove it, that the proudeſt reaſoner need not be aſhamed to confeſs his weakneſs: the meek and lowly mind avows it with gladneſs, becauſe in its own feebleneſs and the power of God it ſees the true and proper grounds of faith, of confidence in the promiſes of God, and of rational acquieſcence in the wiſdom of his diſpenſations.

Chriſtianity is called by the Apoſtles, the "diſpenſation of the fulneſs of time[l]," "the myſtery reſerved for the latter days:" and the terms "latter days[m]," and "latter ages," which ſo frequently occur in the

[k] Acts i. 7. [l] Epheſ. i. 10.
[m] Joel ii. 28. Acts ii. 17. Heb. i. 2. 1 Pet. i. 5. 20.

writers

writers both of the Old and New Teſtament, the Jewiſh Church always underſtood to refer to the days of their promiſed Meſſiah. The Holy Spirit ſeems to have characterized that period of time by ſuch an appellation, becauſe the Goſpel of Chriſt was to contain the laſt inſtruction of God to man, "to cloſe the book, to ſeal up the viſion and the prophecy, and to bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs[n]."

In this ſenſe the expreſſion is plain and appropriate; but no man can with juſtice apply the relative term lateneſs to the firſt preaching of the Goſpel, unleſs it be in his power to aſcertain the proportion which the age of Tiberius bears to the future, as well as to the paſt, and to determine for how many ages the Creator intends that the fabric of the univerſe and all that is in it ſhould ſubſiſt; and ſince this cannot be done, ſince the "terrible day of the Lord," for wiſe and merciful reaſons, is ſhrouded in darkneſs; for this reaſon only it is abſurd to pronounce of

[n] Dan. ix. 24.

any

any revelation, that it cannot be from God, becauſe, according to our notions of time, it was revealed too late.

Surely if God be omnipotent and infinite, and man finite and dependent, it is as unreaſonable for man to ſay, that God ſhall deliver his commands at this or that particular time, and to refuſe obedience to them becauſe they come either ſooner or later than he thinks right, as it would be to preſcribe what the ſubject of the commands ſhould be, and what the mode in which they ſhould be delivered. In the wonderful and unſearchable plans of Omniſcience, there muſt, from their very nature, be many hidden motives, which will elude the utmoſt keenneſs of human penetration, and many reaſons for delay, which are known to him alone, with whom "a thouſand years are as one day, and one day as a thouſand years*;" for theſe reaſons it would be vain to ſearch. But even from our own partial and limited view of God's deſigns, from our own obſervation of

* 2 Pet. iii. 8.

the

the conſtant analogies of his government, and the uſual courſe of his Providence, we may infer, that ſuch a diſpenſation, as we know Chriſtianity to be, could not have been revealed to any effectual purpoſe at an earlier period of ſociety.

Through the whole order of creation, and the whole ſcheme of Providence, we obſerve marks of a progreſſive advancement and a gradual diſcovery of truth. In all the operations of the human mind, in the important diſcoveries of art, and the improvements of laws and government, we go on ſtep by ſtep, as leiſure and opportunities offer, or new wants are created, until at laſt we have completely filled up the firſt rude outline which neceſſity ſuggeſted. A ſimilar progreſs is to be obſerved in the higher and more valuable truths of religion; and God Almighty, in mercy and love to his creatures, ſeems always to have proportioned his diſcoveries, not only to the actual wants of mankind, but to their capacity of receiving truth themſelves, and their means of communicating it to others.

In the infancy of the world, God converſed perſonally with man; and as often as the uncertainty inſeparable from traditional communications, or the perverſeneſs and corruption of human nature, had deſtroyed the force of his commands, and obliterated the memory of his promiſes, he interpoſed continually to reſcue "a righteous ſeed" from the general depravity; he confirmed their wavering faith by a renewal of his covenants, and ſatisfied their doubts by a diſplay of ſupernatural power. But, as their numbers increaſed, neither the warnings of his Almighty voice, nor the continual manifeſtations of his power, nor even his ſenſible preſence in glory amongſt them, were ſufficient to retain his choſen people in a firm reliance upon his word, and a ſteady obedience to his precepts. Suppoſe that the Goſpel had been preached, without any preparatory diſcipline, to men thus rooted as it were to the earth, unuſed to any thing like abſtract reaſoning, and unable to raiſe their minds from the objects of ſenſe which ſurrounded them; is it at all credible that they would have embraced a ſyſtem of religion,

whoſe

whose essential character is its spirituality? which teaches us, that "the Lord of heaven and earth, the Lofty One that inhabiteth eternity[p]," is a Spirit; that he desires "to be worshipped in spirit and in truth[q];" and that the silent devotion of the heart is more grateful to him than all the magnificence of ceremonious worship, the costly shrine, the pompous offering, and the blood of ten thousand victims.

Again, Christianity was to be universal; it was not to be a local worship, or a partial institution, but was designed to extend its blessed influence over the whole race of mankind. How then was it to be generally propagated, before any mode had been devised of conveying instruction to distant countries, or remote posterity? Tradition, the only source of information which the early ages possessed, was sufficient for them; few in number, and closely connected by affinity, by alliance, and by situation; at a time too when the period of human life was extended so far beyond its present

[p] Isai. lvii. 15. [q] John iv. 23.

limits, it was eaſy for a family or a tribe, to tranſmit to their poſterity any truth, or any fact, without miſtake or material alteration.

But when population increaſed, when colonies were ſettled in diſtant regions, and unconnected ſtates were riſing into power, tradition loſt its uſe, and the inſtructions which it had conveyed were gradually forgotten. No important leſſons could then be given for general uſe, until new channels of communication were opened, until the earth was not only peopled but civilized, until ſound philoſophy had prepared the mind for the ſtudy of abſtract truths, and the familiar uſe of letters had ſupplied the means of making them public.

Thus, from the character of Chriſtianity itſelf, and from the general influence which it was intended to have over the world, it may fairly be argued, that the mercy of God was as conſpicuous in delaying the bleſſing ſo long, as it was in giving it at all; and, from what our own experience teaches

teaches us, from the inſight which we are permitted to have into the divine counſels, partial and imperfect as it is, it may alſo be argued, that, had not the bleſſing been delayed ſo long, it would have failed of its intended effect; unleſs indeed we ſuppoſe a conſtant miracle to have attended its progreſs, and an overruling control to have ſupported it; which, had it been the caſe, would have ſuperſeded the uſe of human reaſon, have deſtroyed the free agency, and conſequently the reſponſibility of man, and have taken away all the merit of a rational faith, a faith founded upon conviction.

From the period of its promulgation therefore, which hereafter I ſhall ſhew to have been the moſt proper that could have been deviſed, and, from the gradual preparation for its eſtabliſhment, we might infer the divine origin of Chriſtianity on this ground merely, that the time and the preparation, if properly conſidered, reconcile the foreknowledge of God with the freedom of man. And here I would be content to leave the ſubject for the preſent,

were it not neceſſary to notice another queſtion, of high importance, which is frequently obtruded upon us. Suppoſing that a knowledge of the Chriſtian doctrines be neceſſary to eternal happineſs, what is to become of thoſe who lived before they were revealed? or of thoſe to whom the glad tidings of peace and ſalvation as yet have not been preached?

Here, as before, we might fairly plead our ignorance of the counſels of God, our reluctance to pry with eager curioſity into that which is hidden from us, and our diſpoſition to be contented with that which is plainly revealed. Simple and honeſt minds, which are ſolicitous only for truth, will gladly admit the validity of ſuch a plea: but ſimplicity and ſingleneſs of mind are not the virtues of the enemies of our faith.

In the declamations of the Heathen ſophiſts, from whom our own Deiſtical writers have liberally borrowed, we find frequent compariſons between the intolerance of Chriſtianity and the liberal ſpirit of Paganiſm.

ganiſm. Chriſtians declared, that they would have no ſhare in the celebration of Heathen myſteries; they avowed their abhorrence of their ſacrifices, and ſteadily refuſed to bow down before their idols; therefore they were perſecuted as the enemies of mankind, as devoting to endleſs perdition all but the friends of their own ſect, and the converts to their own worſhip.

But was this ever a juſt accuſation? Far from it; Chriſtians, it is true, from the very firſt publication of the Goſpel, have uniformly declared, that to inherit eternal ſalvation, we muſt have faith in Jeſus Chriſt—that he is the "only Mediator between God and man[r]"—that "eternal life is the gift of God, through him[s]"—and "that there is no other name given under heaven, by which man can be ſaved[t]."

But do Chriſtians condemn, or, if fu-

[r] 1 Tim. ii. 5. [s] Rom. vi. 23.
[t] Acts iv. 12.

rious and bigoted zealots have ever done ſo, is it in Chriſtianity to condemn thoſe, to whom theſe truths were never known? It cannot be—we pray indeed, that it would pleaſe the Almighty to ſoften the hearts, and to enlighten the underſtandings, of all his creatures: but God forbid, that we ſhould preſume to ſet bounds to his compaſſion, or to ſay how far his mercy and patient abiding ſhall be continued.

For thoſe indeed, who, having once received the word, voluntarily apoſtatize from it; who vilify and traduce the Revelation itſelf, as if it were the invention of man, and not the word of God; and who labour, by falſe repreſentations of its hiſtory, and perverſe interpretations of its doctrines, to leſſen its *practical* influence upon mankind; for thoſe, we do pronounce, upon the authority of our holy Teacher and his Apoſtles, that the bitterneſs of wrath is reſerved, and that, when he ſhall hereafter appear in glory, the Lord will caſt them out from his preſence, to the puniſhment they have deſerved.

But

But we never aſſert, that ignorance will be a reaſon for condemnation; we have been taught, what is ſtrictly conformable to our notions of the goodneſs and mercy of God, by thoſe, "to whom it was given to ſee the myſteries of heaven"—we have been taught, that every allowance will be made for involuntary ignorance; that a "man is accepted according to that he hath, not according to that he hath not[x];" and that, in God's good time, the Religion of Chriſt will become univerſal: and, till that glorious event takes place, we conclude that the merits of his death extend their influence even to thoſe who ſtill remain in the darkneſs and ſhadow of death.

With what confidence, then, can it be aſſerted, that God is either partial in his diſcoveries of truth, or unjuſt in his promiſes of happineſs? Or upon what principle can it be maintained, that a revelation cannot be divine, becauſe it was gradually opened, and is not yet univerſal? when our reaſon teaches us, that ſuch a

[x] 2 Cor. iii. 12.

reve-

revelation could not have been communicated in any other way, conſiſtently with the general tenor of God's government; and the revelation itſelf expreſsly declares, that neither its promiſes nor its threatenings are limited, that futurity will prove its impartiality, and that, when the veil is withdrawn from our eyes, all apparent inequalities will be done away.

The very delay then, which is complained of, is, as I have remarked before, the ſtrongeſt argument, both of the wiſdom of God, and the juſtice of God; of his wiſdom, in proceeding ſlowly and ſilently, by the operation of ſecond cauſes, to the fulfilment of his eternal purpoſe; of his juſtice, in accumulating, for the conviction of man, ſuch an unbroken ſeries of teſtimony, that no ſophiſtry will ever be able to prevail againſt it.

Conſiſtency of conduct, and uniformity of deſign, we always conſider as infallible criteria of wiſdom. We admire the ſagacity of mind, which can promptly chooſe a wiſe end; the diſcernment, which can

ſelect

ſelect the propereſt means for executing it; and the fortitude, which can go on ſteadily to its completion, in defiance of difficulty or oppoſition. And in all the concerns of human life, our opinion of man's wiſdom riſes in proportion to the excellency of the end propoſed, and the difficulty of the means which lead to ſucceſs.

Doubtleſs it will be granted, that the human imagination can conceive no end equal in magnitude and importance to the *redemption of mankind*: and if it be poſſible from the earlieſt times, and the very firſt act of guilt and diſobedience to God, to trace a plan, uniformly tending to the accompliſhment of this great deſign; if it can be proved, from the eventful hiſtory of one nation, that the frame of their government, their peculiar inſtitutions, and the ritual of their worſhip, were all in fact preparatory to this deſign: whilſt the ſtrange reverſes of their fortunes, and their frequent viciſſitudes, from power and opulence, to captivity and deſolation, all contributed to promote it—if, meanwhile, the ſame governing principle be found to con-

trol

trol the fates of other people, and the revolutions of other empires; if Aſſyria, Perſia, Macedon, and Rome, in purſuing their own ambitious ſchemes of conqueſt and dominion, are only the blind agents in the general ſcheme of Providence, "howbeit they meant not ſo, neither did their heart think ſo [y];" if all this can be proved, from the undoubted evidence of hiſtory, we may boldly aſk the Infidel, whether it does not become him to cry out, with the Egyptian Magi of old, "this is the finger of God [z]."

[y] Iſai. x. 7. [z] Exod. viii. 19.

THE holy Prophet was permitted to foreſee, not only the conqueſt and captivity of his brethren, but their ſubſequent deliverance and reſtoration to their native country. They were to ſuffer, he tells them, for their impurities, for their neglect of the worſhip which God himſelf had preſcribed to them, and their attachment to the idolatries of Moab and Ammon. But the juſtice of God would in time be ſatisfied; they were to return to Judæa, with a new heart and a new ſpi-

SER-

SERMON II.

EZEKIEL xxxvi. 22.

I DO NOT THIS FOR YOUR SAKES, O HOUSE OF ISRAEL, BUT FOR MINE HOLY NAME'S SAKE.

THE holy Prophet was permitted to foreſee, not only the conqueſt and captivity of his brethren, but their ſubſequent deliverance and reſtoration to their native country. They were to ſuffer, he tells them, for their iniquities, for their neglect of the worſhip which God himſelf had preſcribed to them, and their attachment to the idolatries of Moab and Ammon. But the juſtice of God would in time be ſatisfied; they were to return to Judæa, with a new heart and a new ſpirit;

rit; God was to be again their God, and they were to be again his people; and this was to take place, this ſignal inſtance of Divine mercy was to be exhibited to the world, not for their ſakes, He reminds them, but for the ſake of God's holy name.

To glorify his name, to teach mankind, that is, not only that there is a Creator and Governor of the univerſe, infinite in power and knowledge; but that there is and can be only one ſuch Being, and that He alone is the proper object of human worſhip; and to eſtabliſh the important doctrine on the indiſputable authority of Revelation, as it was the chief ground and motive for all the viciſſitudes in the fortunes of the Jewiſh people, ſo it was the firſt ſtep in the ſcheme of God's providence, when He ſummoned the faithful Abraham from an idolatrous country and an idolatrous family, when He confirmed his belief by the evidence of works, which human power never could have effected, and rewarded his obedience by the promiſe,

miſe, that "in his ſeed all the nations of the earth ſhould be bleſſed[a]."

An attempt to demonſtrate the unity of the eternal Godhead would be foreign to my deſign: but it is of importance to conſider, how it happened, that a truth, revealed to the primitive ages, and diſcoverable in all ages by the deductions of human reaſon, was gradually corrupted, and loſt, as to all practical purpoſes, amidſt the wild dreams and monſtrous inventions of Polytheiſm; and why it was neceſſary, as a preparatory ſtep, to the introduction of Chriſtianity, that the knowledge of the only true God, the ſolid rock upon which the fabric of all true religion muſt be raiſed, ſhould be taught and maintained, not in an obſcure corner, or a ſmall and inſignificant community, but in the eſtabliſhed worſhip of a numerous people, connected, as has been well obſerved, either as allies, as tributaries, or as ſubjects, with every part of the civilized world.

[a] Gen. xxii. 18.

In

In reviewing the hiſtory of Religion, it is a point of extreme nicety and difficulty, to diſtinguiſh exactly between the diſcoveries of reaſon and the remains of early tradition. Man is undoubtedly, in the very frame and conſtitution of his nature, a religious being; God has given him a conſciouſneſs of dependence and inferiority, a natural anxiety to diſcover the will of his ſuperior, and a natural inclination to offer up his adoration and thankſgiving, for the bleſſings which he enjoys. Feeling this natural impulſe within us, and having long been taught to direct it in a reaſonable ſervice to its proper object, we are apt perhaps to think better of our own powers than we ought, and to call ſome truths, truths of natural Religion, which are in reality the Revelations of God. It is, at all events, wiſer and ſafer to attribute more to God, than to man; and if we conſider as a matter of fact, what our own reaſon has done, we ſhall indeed be little inclined to prize it too highly.

"God," as the Apoſtle tells us, certainly

"never

"never left himſelf without a witneſs[b]." From the mighty works of his creation, it was at all times eaſy to infer his power; from their beauty and utility, his goodneſs; and from their order, ſymmetry, and regularity, his unity.

So far it was the voice of nature, and the concurrent opinion of all mankind, that there is one ſupreme God, the Maker, Preſerver, and Governor of the world; and this may with ſtrict propriety be called the Religion of Nature.

But when it came to be a queſtion, how the Supreme Being conducted his government, then began the grand miſtake, from which all the abſurdities of Paganiſm date their origin: for, while the Deity was ſuppoſed to be ſhrouded in his own ineffable majeſty, and abſorbed in the contemplation of his own glory, he was beheld at an awful diſtance, as the object of fear and apprehenſion, rather than of love. The contemplation of his Power, and his Pro-

[b] Acts xiv. 17.

vidence, in ſuſtaining and regulating the complicated ſyſtem of nature, did not lead, as it might have done, by fair and rational analogy, to juſt notions of his moral government; the cloſe and intimate relation which ſubſiſts between God and man, as the Creator and the creature, was entirely overlooked; and all acceſs to the one Supreme was denied to man, except through the interceſſion of his delegates, the ſubordinate deities, who were ſuppoſed to be the interpreters of his will, and the miniſters of his power.

From this ſource were derived all the fictions of Polytheiſm, and all the groſs and abominable corruptions of ſymbolical worſhip. It was not that the exiſtence of God was denied, or his Providence controverted, but that his unity was changed into a preeminence in rank and authority over a multitude of imaginary beings, who were repreſented as the agents and mediators between God and man; his holy and incommunicable name was profaned by an union with idols; his worſhip was aſſociated with theirs, and the glory due only

to

to him was laviſhly beſtowed upon the very loweſt of his creatures.

The ſacred Hiſtorian has not preciſely marked the firſt riſe of idolatrous worſhip; but he has told us that it began early, and that, in defiance of repeated admonitions, the idolaters continued to increaſe in number, and in wickedneſs, till "the meaſure of their iniquity was full;" they were then ſwept away from the face of the earth, by that great and awful diſpenſation, which has ſtamped upon the form and the ſubſtance of the material world, indelible marks of the power of the Creator.

It was not long however before the deſcendants of the "righteous remnant," who had been ſaved, forgot the miraculous preſervation of their anceſtors; and as ſoon as they had ſeparated from each other, and had ſettled in the countries allotted to them by the eſpecial appointment of God, we find them almoſt immediately relapſing into the very iniquities which had brought

upon their forefathers ſo terrible a puniſhment.

When the memory of early revelations was loſt, and the Almighty had withdrawn himſelf from immediate communication with his creatures, nature taught them to look up to the heavenly bodies, whoſe ſplendor was the continual object of their admiration, and whoſe utility their daily experience teſtified. In theſe glorious luminaries they fixed the reſidence of thoſe ideal beings, to whom they had aſſigned the office of mediation and interceſſion with the Supreme Lord of the creation.

Planetary worſhip then was the firſt ſtep in the career of falſehood; and it was accompanied, as in rude and uncivilized ſocieties it naturally would be, not with the cheerful piety, and rational awe, which true Religion inſpires, but with the reſtleſs and haraſſing apprehenſions of ſuperſtition; with ſudden and unexpected changes from hope to diſappointment, and from joy and gladneſs to diſmay and deſpair.

Againſt

Againſt this dreadful ſtate of doubt and apprehenſion, the Holy Spirit warns the choſen people of Iſrael: "Learn not the ways of the Heathen," ſays the Prophet, "and be not diſmayed at the ſigns of heaven, for the Heathen are diſmayed at them [c]."

The effects of this ſuperſtition upon the mind were as various as the viciſſitudes of the elements are various and inconſtant; at one time the face of nature is ſerene and tranquil; at another, the ſky is black with darkneſs; the heavenly bodies withdraw their influence, and the ſtorm and the hurricane ſpread deſolation around.

Hence aróſe the diſtinction of good and evil demons, of whom the former were ſuppoſed to diſpenſe to man the bleſſings of the Creator, health, and plenty, and fruitful ſeaſons; the latter, his puniſhments, ſickneſs, and plague, and famine. Hence too it happened, that if men were at one time diſpoſed to adore the Creator,

[c] Jer. ix. 14.

as the beneficent Father of the univerſe, the Parent of good, impartially ſhowering down his gifts upon all; at another, they turned from him with dread and apprehenſion, as a moroſe, tyrannical Being, ſporting with the miſeries of mortals, who delighted in gloomy and myſterious rites, and whoſe fury was to be appeaſed by the blood of his creatures.

To the worſhip of the heavenly bodies ſucceeded that of deified men, following, it ſhould ſeem, in a natural order, the progreſs of civilization, and the improvements of ſocial life; for deified men were the founders of colonies, the inventors of uſeful arts, the legiſlators, who by wiſdom had curbed the impetuoſity of man, and taught him the great duty of ſubmiſſion to legal authority, and the heroes, who by their valour had extended the dominion and increaſed the proſperity of their native country.

Gratitude for benefits received might perhaps be the original motive for worſhipping the benefactor; but pride and vanity

nity perpetuated what gratitude began; and while the people offered their incenſe at the ſhrines of the heroes, whoſe actions they had been taught to venerate, the deſcendants of the illuſtrious characters gloried in the poſſeſſion of ſtatues, and genealogies, which authenticated their alliance to Divinity.

From the union of theſe two branches of idolatrous worſhip aroſe a third, a ſtrange and motley compound, which deſcended to the adoration of attributes, and paſſions, of vices and virtues, and even of plants and animals[d].

Such is the general outline of the riſe and progreſs of Gentile idolatry; the origin is ever the ſame; and however it might ſometimes aſſume more brilliancy of ornament to pleaſe the eye, and more ſeducing allurements to faſcinate the imagination, and to corrupt the paſſions, the ſame

[d] For a fuller view of the origin and progreſs of idolatrous worſhip, the reader is referred to the "Divine Legation of Moſes Demonſtrated." Book iv. ſect. 4.

general principle may be traced from the Sabian idolatry of Chaldea, through the polluted channel of Egyptian ſuperſtition, until we ſee it under all the advantages of beautiful poetry, and the pageantry of games and feſtivals, in the temples of Greece and Rome.

To give more than the general outline is not neceſſary to my argument; and were it neceſſary, I ſhould be loth, before an audience of Scholars, to enter into a detail which the general courſe of their ſtudies has familiarized to them; and, God knows, it is at all times a painful taſk to purſue the wanderings of the human mind through ſuch an inextricable labyrinth of error and abſurdity.

But where, it may be aſked, amidſt ſuch a multiplicity of imaginary Deities, whilſt "[a] the glory of the incorruptible God was changed into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beaſts, and creeping things"—where

[a] Rom. i. 23.

was

was the notion to be found of one Supreme God, which even the Heathen world had not entirely loſt, although "knowing God, they worſhipped him not as God?"[f]

The belief, or the perſuaſion then, for I by no means aſſert that it was a juſt and accurate knowledge, exiſted in the colleges of the prieſts, and the ſchools of the philoſophers; and of the philoſophers, the weakeſt declared, that variety of worſhip muſt be grateful to a Being delighting in the concord and harmony of his works. The wiſeſt maintained, that a myſterious veil muſt be thrown over the awful truth, which was too excellent for vulgar minds to comprehend: and the prieſts meanwhile carefully ſecluded from general notice a doctrine, which, had it been publicly avowed, would have expoſed the fallacy of their auguries, their oracles, their vows, and their ſacrifices, and have demoliſhed at one blow the whole fabric of gainful ſuperſtition.

[f] Rom. i. 21.

Thus,

Thus, while in the one caſe upon principle, and in the other from ſelf-intereſt, the knowledge of God was hidden in the dark and impenetrable ſhade of myſteries, the uninitiated multitude were left to the uncontrouled indulgence of their paſſions. At all times, and under all circumſtances, ſymbolical worſhip has been accompanied by corrupt and profligate morals; it is eaſy to ſee why it muſt be ſo; it follows neceſſarily and immediately, as a conſequence of that miſtake which I have ſtated to be the original cauſe of Polytheiſm—the notion of ſubordinate Deities, who have their ſeparate and diſtinct offices aſſigned to them under the one Supreme Cauſe, in the adminiſtration and government of the world.

Moral virtue conſiſts in the practice of thoſe duties which our relative ſituation in ſociety demand; and thoſe duties are of indiſpenſable obligation, becauſe it is the will of God that his creatures ſhould ſo act, as to promote the happineſs of each other. But a variety of Gods may, and perhaps neceſſarily muſt, produce a variety of

of wills; and then it becomes a queſtion, who is to be obeyed? And if we go a ſtep farther, and ſuppoſe it poſſible that the example of any of thoſe Gods ſhould be vicious, then we muſt conclude it to be their will, that man ſhould be vicious alſo: and in this way we may account for that black and dreadful catalogue of vices, which the Apoſtles continually enumerate in their pictures of the Gentile world.

Such then being the ſtate of by far the greater part of the world, when our Saviour entered upon his public miniſtry, if the repreſentation which I have given of their worſhip and their practice be juſt, what can we ſuppoſe would have been the fate of our holy Religion, unleſs the wiſdom of Providence in the general depravity had preſerved a choſen ſeed, who, "although their hearts were hardened, and their underſtandings darkened," blindly accompliſhed the purpoſes of his will, by preſerving in the volumes of their Religion, the hiſtory of the early Revelations, on which the Goſpel was founded, and by adoring

adoring in their public worſhip none but the God of their fathers, the Holy One of Iſrael?

To eſtabliſh a new religion in any caſe muſt be a work of great difficulty; but to eſtabliſh it upon the ruins of inveterate prejudices, and of opinions ſanctioned by time, and by habit; to tell men, that all that they have hitherto been taught is falſe, and that all the impreſſions which their education has given them are nothing more than "lying vanities;" inſtead of granting them the free indulgence of their inclinations and their appetites, to impoſe rigid and ſevere reſtraints upon both; to expoſe the nothingneſs of the faireſt ideal picture of virtue, and the brighteſt exterior ſemblance of morality; and to require truth and purity in the inward parts; all this is a taſk ſurpaſſing the powers of a human teacher, and this was the taſk of Chriſt and his Apoſtles.

Let us ſuppoſe then that a perſon had come with this deſign, not to Jeruſalem, but to any of the celebrated cities of the Gen-

Gentiles, to Corinth, Athens, or Rome; that, without any previous expectation of his appearance, he had announced himſelf as the meſſenger of God; let his addreſs be made, not to the wealthy, the powerful, or the wiſe, but, as our bleſſed Saviour's actually was, to the poor, the lowly, and the ignorant; let him command them, with the tone and authority of a teacher ſent from God, to give up their eſtabliſhed belief, to quit their former habits, to repent of their ſins, and to be converted;—what would have been the effect, is it probable, of ſuch a ſummons? If they had been able to reſtrain their indignation, at hearing that the Deities, which they had long been accuſtomed to reverence and adore, were now to be forſaken and deſpiſed; if there had been calmneſs and moderation enough to reaſon and argue upon the ſubject, would not the firſt queſtion have been, Who is the God you ſpeak of, and what is his name?

Here then it would have been neceſſary, in the firſt inſtance, to have proved the

the exiſtence of one Supreme God, the Creator and Governor of the univerſe; to have proved his attributes, his power, his wiſdom, and his juſtice; to have proved, in ſhort, all the great truths of natural Religion, upon which Chriſtianity is founded.

You tell us, they would have ſaid, that you are a meſſenger from God; convince us therefore, firſt, that the God you call upon us to obey really exiſts; that he did, as you pretend, create the univerſe by his power; and that he now ſuſtains, directs, and governs it by his Providence; and then it will be time for us to conſider, whether the ſyſtem which you offer us be really his revealed will, or not.

But let us change the ſcene, and obſerve our bleſſed Lord addreſſing himſelf to the inhabitants of Jeruſalem: here he came to his own. The foundation of the religion which he deſigned to teach was already laid in the popular opinions, and the national faith. The unity of God was acknowledged by all ranks and all deſcriptions

ſcriptions of men; a call to repentance excited no aſtoniſhment, and cauſed no prejudice, in the firſt inſtance, againſt his doctrines, becauſe it was immediately connected with all the legal ceremonies of their Religion, and all the principal facts of their hiſtory; and a claim to the office and character of a Meſſiah in the firſt inſtance prepoſſeſſed them in favour of the perſon who made it, becauſe all the Prophets had given them the promiſe of a deliverer; and it was the firſt and fondeſt wiſh of their hearts, to witneſs the accompliſhment.

"Let the counſel of the Holy One of Iſrael draw nigh[g], and where is the promiſe of his coming[h]?" were become almoſt proverbial expreſſions amongſt the Jews; ſo that a teacher, calling himſelf the Chriſt, was certain at leaſt of finding hearers ready to attend to his inſtructions, and eager to examine his pretenſions. Then there was time to obſerve his character and his conduct; to diſcuſs the nature of his miracles,

[g] Iſaiah v. 19. [h] 2 Pet. ii. 3, 4.

and

and to feel the intrinſic purity of his doctrines, and the ſuperior force of his arguments, till at length a body of witneſſes was formed; then it was immaterial, as to its progreſs, that is, and its future ſucceſs, whether the nation at large admitted the new Religion, or not; indeed their very rejection of it was, as it turned out, a convincing argument of its truth.

It was with a view therefore to guard the fundamental doctrines of Revelation from the contagion of falſehood, and, by ſo doing, to aid and aſſiſt the firſt publication of the Goſpel, that God thought fit to ſeparate the Jewiſh nation from the reſt of mankind; that he favoured them, above all other people, by diſcloſing to them, from time to time, "the deep and ſecret things of his wiſdom;" and that he made them the depoſitaries of truth, by committing to their cuſtody the living oracles of his word.

In what manner this ſeparation was effected, and by what admirable methods the Providence of God contrived to interweave

weave and connect their eſtabliſhment as a church, with their civil polity as a ſtate, and to make the religious code of the former both the hiſtory and the legal inſtitutes of the latter, ſo that no ſuſpicion of fraud or forgery can, with any reaſon, be urged againſt either, is a point of ſuch material importance, that it deſerves a ſeparate diſcuſſion: I ſhall reſerve it therefore for a future diſcourſe.

It cannot, meanwhile, be expected, that I ſhould enter into a formal refutation of the frivolous cavils, and, to call them by no worſe a name, the poor and vulgar jeſts, with which free-thinking philoſophers have attacked the ſcheme of a favoured people, as if God could have any favourites, but thoſe who love and obey him, and whoſe principal aim it is, "to do juſtly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before him[i];" or as if the Father of mankind, whoſe mercy is over all his works, could have ſhut up the knowledge of himſelf within the narrow precincts of a particular church, unleſs it had been with a

[i] Micah vi. 8.

deſign, worthy indeed of his care, and becoming the wiſdom of his Providence, upon the ſame foundation gradually to erect the univerſal Church of Chriſt.

The ſentence of the Prophet, which I have quoted in my text, explains the whole œconomy: "It is not for your ſakes, O houſe of Iſrael, that I do this, but for mine holy Name's ſake[k]." It is not on account of your own merits, or for the ſake of your own proſperity, that I have diſtinguiſhed you with peculiar marks of my favour; but it is to glorify my great name, that all the world may ſee and confeſs, that I am indeed the true God, and that there is none other beſide me.

[k] Ezek. xxxvi. 22.

SER-

SERMON III.

NUMBERS xxiii. 9.

LO, THE PEOPLE SHALL DWELL ALONE, AND SHALL NOT BE RECKONED AMONGST THE NATIONS.

HAVING ſhewn in my former Diſcourſe, that, if Polytheiſm had been univerſal, Chriſtianity could not have been promulged, and that it pleaſed the Almighty, for that reaſon, to ſeparate the Jewiſh nation from the reſt of mankind, in order to make them the guardians of his Revelations, I now proceed to lay before you a view of the methods by which that ſeparation was effected.

The Prophet of Midian was ſummoned by the King of Moab, in the true ſpirit of idolatry, to imprecate the vengeance of heaven upon the choſen people; but the Holy Spirit gave him utterance, and he bleſſed where he was deſired to curſe. He foreſaw, through the whole courſe of their eventful hiſtory, the marked diſcrimination of their character, the peculiarity of their government, and their reſidence in the promiſed land under the immediate protection of God; and in terms of benediction ſimilar to thoſe which were uſed by their own Patriarch [b], and their own Legiſlator [c], he pronounced that "Iſrael ſhould dwell alone." As there was at that time no probability, humanly ſpeaking, that the Iſraelites would ever be able to expel the inhabitants of the country which they were going to invade, and even if we ſuppoſe that conqueſt to have been probable, as a diſtinct and ſeparate exiſtence is contrary to all the maxims of human policy, and to the natural inclinations and wiſhes of the

[a] Numb. xxii. [b] Gen. xlix. 8.
[c] Deut. xxxiii. 28.

human

human heart, which lead nations, as well as individuals, to intercourſe and commerce, and aſſociation with each other, nothing but the foreſight of God could have conceived the poſſibility of ſo extraordinary a fact, and nothing leſs than the power and the wiſdom of God could have brought it to paſs.

Let us ſee then how the Almighty contrived, whilſt all other nations were tending to union and connexion with each other, and prided themſelves upon the community of their religion, to keep his peculiar people at a diſtance from all others, and to make even their vices and their prejudices ſubſervient to the purpoſes of ſeparation and diſtinction.

The government of the Jews differed from every other government in this fundamental point; that the ſupreme power of the ſtate reſided neither in a man, nor in a body of men, but in God: whatever title, or whatever authority, was given to their chief magiſtrates, whether they were Judges, Kings, or High Prieſts, they were ſtrictly and pro-

perly the delegates of the Supreme God. Thus there was no diſtinction whatever between their eſtabliſhment as a church, and their conſtitution as a political body; for the laws, which were framed to ſecure and preſerve the worſhip of the one true God, were in fact the civil laws of the people, and a branch of their political government.

Such were the terms of the original covenant between God and his people. He had choſen them for his ſubjects, as well as his worſhippers; and they had acknowledged him for their King, as well as their God. "Say to them," was the command of the Almighty to Moſes, "ſay to them, If ye will obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then ye ſhall be a peculiar treaſure to me above all people; ye ſhall be unto me a kingdom of prieſts, and an holy nation[d]:" and the anſwer of the people was, "All that the Lord hath ſpoken, that will we do[e]."

In all human ſocieties, obedience to the

[d] Exod. xix. 5. [e] Exod. xix. 8.

laws

laws which protect him is the virtue of the citizen; in the Theocracy of the Jews, it was his religion: for, as their own Hiſtorian tells us, Moſes did not make Religion a part of virtue; but moral virtue, juſtice, that is, temperance, and fortitude, good order, and all the great duties which cement and conſolidate the fabric of civil ſociety, the Divine Legiſlator made parts of Religion[f].

Here then at once there is a manifeſt diſtinction between the people of God and all other nations, in the very eſſential and fundamental articles of their conſtitution: a diſtinction, neceſſarily cauſed by the primary deſign and end of their ſeparation; which, as we have ſeen, was to preſerve the pure worſhip of the one inviſible God, and to tranſmit to poſterity all the great truths of Religion, which naturally flow from that ſource.

God then being the Supreme Magiſtrate of their ſtate, idolatry, which was an expreſs violation of the compact between

[f] Joſephus contra Apion, lib. ii. ſect. 16.

the Governor and the governed, a tranſgreſſion, as it is called, of the covenant, was puniſhed with the ſame rigour with which human legiſlators have at all times, and in all ages, juſtly puniſhed acts of treaſon and rebellion againſt the ſovereign authority of the ſtate.

Wherever the Iſraelite came, he was to aſſert the great and glorious name of Jehovah, to proclaim the iniquity of worſhipping ſtrange Gods, to break down their images, to deſtroy their groves, and trample upon their altars; and with the idolaters themſelves, if they perſiſted in their crimes, he was to form no league or treaty whatever, to ſhew them no mercy or compaſſion, but to ſmite and utterly deſtroy them.

And if amongſt his own people, or his own tribe, or even in the boſom of his own family, any inclination ſhould be found to emulate the corruptions of his neighbours, or any attempt be made to ſeduce him from his allegiance to the only true God, he is commanded to puniſh inſtantly;

ſtantly; neither the habits of long and familiar acquaintance, nor the endearments of friendſhip, nor even the ties of filial and parental affection, are to withhold his hand from ſtriking the blow. "If thy brother, the ſon of thy mother, or thy ſon, or thy daughter entice thee ſecretly, ſaying, Let us go and ſerve other Gods, which thou haſt not known, thou ſhalt not conſent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither ſhall thine eye pity him; but thou ſhalt ſurely kill him, becauſe he hath thought to thruſt thee away from the Lord thy God[1]."

Thus the great diſtinction of Religion was enforced by the poſitive prohibition of all community of worſhip with idolaters, even by the expreſs command of extirpating them wherever they exiſted; and upon their ſteady and faithful perſeverance in the worſhip of the God of their fathers, depended entirely their poſſeſſion of the country which he had given to them, the peace and happineſs of individuals, and the general proſperity of their empire.

[1] Deut. xiii. 6—9.

To

To forbid, under ſevere penalties, what others love and cultivate, is the ſevereſt method of drawing a boundary between thoſe we wiſh to ſeparate: thus the Jews were expreſsly commanded not to paſs their children through the fire, like the barbarous worſhippers of Moloch [h]; not to diſfigure or wound their bodies, like the followers of Baal; not to perform the acts of devotion in high places, in gloomy caverns, or obſcure receſſes; nor throw the ſhade of myſtery over their worſhip, by planting impenetrable groves in the neighbourhood of their tabernacles [i].

But whilſt all imitation of the horrid rites of their neighbours, and the abſurd ſuperſtition of other nations, was expreſsly prohibited to the Jews, God gave them a ritual and a practical ſyſtem of worſhip, which of itſelf was eminently calculated to gain upon their minds, and to ſecure them from the contagion of Polytheiſm.

In the days of the Patriarchs the pompous and majeſtic diſplay of ceremonious

[h] Levit. xviii. 21. [i] Deut. 16. 21.

worſhip

worſhip was not neceſſary; the fruits of the earth, and the firſtlings of the flock, were heaped upon the rude and ſimple altar, which the tribe or the family conſecrated to that pious uſe in the vicinity of their camp: thither the devout believer repaired to conſult, as appears to have been the caſe, the oracle of God in caſes of difficulty, to offer up thankſgivings for mercies and benefits received, and to pour forth prayers for future happineſs.

But in after times a numerous multitude, devoted to ſenſible objects, pleaſed with the falſe worſhip of the country which they had quitted, and in that in which they were afterwards ſettled, ſurrounded by nations who delighted in ſhew and pageantry, and all the external glare of ſymbolical worſhip; a people ſo circumſtanced required ſomething more ornamental than the primitive ſimplicity of their forefathers, to ſecure them from the allurements of falſe religion, and to attach them to the naked purity of truth.

God therefore in his mercy, allowing for

for their natural weakneſs, and wiſhing that the awful truth of his Godhead might be firmly rooted in their minds, that they might be without excuſe if they looked elſewhere for protection, and offered up to others the homage due only to their God, in conſideration to their infirmities gave them viſible tokens of his continual preſence amongſt them. Here it was that the patience and long ſuffering of God diſplayed themſelves in the moſt ſtriking manner, by every poſſible accommodation to their inclinations and their prejudices, nay, I may ſay, even to their capricious partialities.

It was not enough that the great truth of the unity of the Godhead was formally announced in the preſence of the aſſembled congregation, and that the adoration of ſtrange Gods was expreſsly forbid; in addition to the poſitive command, and the poſitive prohibition, other means were tried to guard the choſen race from the pollutions of idolatry.

To their great progenitor the Almighty had

had announced himſelf as the God of his family, and to his deſcendants afterwards, as the tutelary God of the nation. Whilſt the nations of Canaan are erecting altars to the Gods of their own creation, the Gods of the hills, as they were called, and the Gods of the valleys, the Holy One of Iſrael, in compliance with the prevailing prejudices, aſſumes a name: "Tell them," ſays he, when he inveſts his choſen ſervant with his high commiſſion, "Tell them, that I AM hath ſent me unto you [k]."

In the wilderneſs the tent of Moſes was diſtinguiſhed by the appearance of Divine glory before it. Afterwards the choſen ſervant of the Almighty was commanded to erect a ſplendid tabernacle from the pattern which he ſaw exhibited on the mount; in this tabernacle was placed the ark of the covenant, and here the glory of the Lord reſided; the Holy One of Iſrael ſat between the cherubims [l]: from hence the oracles of God were uttered; and before this reſidence of the Moſt High, the high Prieſt appeared annually on the great

[k] Exod. iii. 14.

[l] 2 Sam. vi. 2. 2 Kings xix. 15. Pſalm xcix. 1.

day

day of expiation, when he was to mediate for the ſins of all the people.

When the nation had advanced in its conqueſt of the promiſed land, this holy tabernacle was fixed at Shiloh; and when the conqueſt was complete, as far at leaſt as God intended that it ſhould be carried, at that ſplendid period of their proſperity, when "there was peace in all the land, and every man ſat under his vine, and under his fig-tree[m]," the mercy-ſeat was removed to the city of Jeruſalem, and was placed in the houſe of God with all the pomp and decoration of oriental magnificence.

From the earlieſt times therefore they were never without the actual preſence of God dwelling amongſt them; the external ſymbols of this preſence increaſed in ſplendor with their national proſperity; and when they themſelves were at the zenith of their power, the Temple of their God was the glory of the world.

[m] 1 Kings iv. 25.

As

As the Almighty, though a pure Spirit, and to be adored in ſpirit and in truth, diſdained not to reſide, and to be worſhipped, in a temple made with hands; ſo alſo, from the ſame principle of heavenly benevolence, he preſcribed the order and the offices of the prieſthood, who were to attend continually upon his ſervice; their offerings, their employments, nay, even the very minute detail of their dreſſes, and their ordinary life.

I mean not at preſent to enter into a minute examination of the ceremonial Law; at a future time I ſhall attempt to explain the figurative nature of this Law, and to ſhew that, under the wiſeſt of its ordinances, many of the myſterious and awful truths of Chriſtianity were obſcurely pourtrayed: but at preſent I have only to urge, that its high ſolemnities and ſplendid feſtivals contributed to aſſiſt the great purpoſe of ſeparation, by gratifying the fondneſs of the people for external ſhew, and preſenting continually to their minds the power and the goodneſs of their own God.

The

The ſabbath itſelf, the earlieſt and moſt ſacred of their religious inſtitutions, was a continual memorial of the creation, reminding them, as often as it returned, of that day on which the Almighty had reſted from all his works, and ſaw that they were good. The Paſchal ſupper reminded them of their deliverance, when the angel of the Lord ſmote the Egyptian, and ſpared the Iſraelite. The feaſt of Tabernacles recalled to their recollection their long and ſevere trials in the wilderneſs, when every moment of their exiſtence was in fact a teſtimony of the power of God, and of his Providence watching over their ſafety; and the feaſt of Pentecoſt was a perpetual record of the promulgation of their Law from Mount Sinai, of the miniſtry of angels, the thunderings and lightnings, and all the mighty ſigns and wonders which accompanied the fearful preſence of their God.

Thus it was wiſely and providentially contrived, that the moſt public and ſolemn acts of their Religion ſhould perpetuate the memory of the moſt ſtriking occurrences in

in their hiſtory; and upon all thoſe occaſions it was uſual to fix the impreſſion ſtill deeper in the minds of the people, by a ſummary recapitulation of all which had been done for them, and all the ſignal acts which, by the Providence of God, they had atchieved; and this was done with all the glow and the ardour of poetical enthuſiaſm; in ſongs of triumph for deliverance and victory, and hymns of gratitude for quiet and peaceable poſſeſſion of the promiſed land.

Whilſt the ſolemn preparation, and the ſplendid exhibition of theſe ſtated feſtivals, attached the people to their religion, they alſo anſwered the important purpoſe of attaching them to the country of their inheritance: what was the particular uſe of increaſing this, and of confining all their hopes and all their wiſhes to their poſſeſſions in the land of Canaan, will be ſeen hereafter; at preſent I am only concerned to prove the fact.

From the original promiſe made to Abraham, the inheritance of the land of

Canaan had been at all times the great object of the wiſhes of his poſterity, and the point to which all their views were directed. A period of more than four centuries of ſervitude and oppreſſion in Egypt had not obliterated the remembrance of the promiſe, nor leſſened the fond expectation of its accompliſhment. At the firſt ſummons they were ready to put themſelves under the guidance of a leader, who undertook to conduct them to the haven of their wiſhes; and the wanderings of forty years in dreary and inhoſpitable deſarts, although they tempted them often to murmur and repine, to rebel againſt the authority of their conductor, and even to accuſe the moſt High God of injuſtice, yet ſtill they could not extinguiſh, nay, they even increaſed, the ardent longing for the poſſeſſion of that happy land, which was to repay them for all their ſuffering.

It was natural, therefore, when they at laſt poſſeſſed this expected country, when they found it to be fertile and rich beyond their hopes, "a land of wheat and barley,

ley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates, a land of oil-olive and honey[n]," it was natural that they ſhould love and cheriſh it with the moſt partial attachment; but this attachment the wiſdom of God augmented and confirmed.

In the firſt place their religion was local; it was fixed ſolely to Jeruſalem; and the great duties of it could be no where elſe performed, ſo that as often as the ſtated ſeaſon of their feſtival returned, all Jews, of whatever deſcription, or wherever their reſidence might be, were to go up to the holy city to celebrate their feſtivals; the law was abſolute, and of indiſpenſable obligation.

In addition to this obligation there was another law, ſanctified indeed by a religious ceremony, but in itſelf of a nature purely civil: it was impoſſible for an Iſraelite to alienate his property; the original allotment was to remain unalterable; and whatever changes or variations might be made, they were conſtantly to be rec-

[n] Deut. viii. 8.

tified at the feaſt of Jubilee; "for then," ſays the law, "ye ſhall return every man unto his poſſeſſion *."

It is eaſy to ſee the conſequences of this right of redemption; that while the nation at large was preſerved one and entire, each tribe ſeparately, and each family, were careful to preſerve their own records, to aſcertain their own rights, and to claim their own property; a point of material importance in the diſpenſations of Providence. Bethlehem Ephratah thus remained in the portion of Judah, and the lineage of Jeſſe was preſerved to the days of the Meſſiah pure and unmixed, and ſeparate from the genealogy of every other family in Judea.

The great principle of ſeparation was thus purſued within the general outline of the whole community, through all the ſubordinate diviſions, and all the inferior claſſes of ſociety; and whilſt the nation was diſtinguiſhed as a peculiar people from all other people, every tribe and every fa-

* Deut. iii. 20.

mily

mily had ſome appropriate character, and ſome peculiar privileges, by which they were ſeparated and diſcriminated from one another.

If, from their public inſtitutions, and the greater ceremonies of their Religion, we turn our eyes to their ordinary occupations, and the habits of common life, we ſhall ſee throughout the marks of the ſame deſign, and the effects of the ſame principle of diſcrimination.

From the moment of his birth the Jew was marked as a being diſtinct from the reſt of mankind: the initiatory rite of circumciſion firſt ſtamped him as the ſervant of God, and admitted him to the privileges of the Patriarchal covenant. As his reaſon opened, he was educated, not in the rudiments of human ſcience, but in the precepts of Divine wiſdom; the holy volume of the Law was opened before him; on that he was told to meditate day and night, "to talk of it when he ſat in his houſe, and when he walked by the way; to bind it for a ſign upon his hands,

and a frontlet between his eyes; to write it upon the posts of his house, and upon his gates[p]."

In his Law he found a provision, not only for the higher moralities, and the more important duties, upon which the very existence of civil society depends, but for all the minute occurrences of common life, and all the accidental circumstances which human legislators pass by without notice, because they either consider them as matters of indifference, or do not foresee that they will happen.

For the fashion of his dress, his diet, and the construction of his dwelling, the Jew found in the volumes of his Law, certain and precise regulations; and if he went forth to the labour of the field, the cattle he was to use in his tillage, the seed he was to sow, and the time and mode of gathering his harvest into his garners, were all the subjects of particular and appropriate laws.

[p] Deut. vi. 7—9.

By

By ſuch apparently trivial means did the Almighty wiſdom contrive to fix upon his people a peculiar and diſcriminate character. For every action of their lives there was a rule preſcribed, which limited the particular bias and inclination of his mind; and it was not matter of choice whether they ſhould follow this rule or not; it was indiſpenſably neceſſary; and puniſhment inſtantly followed the violation of it, unleſs by the atonement of his offerings and ſacrifices, the offender could appeaſe the anger of God.

In all ages, and under every variety of ſituation, of knowledge, of power, or of depreſſion, man muſt, in the eſſential characteriſtics of his nature, be ſtill the ſame; his paſſions, and his affections, however modified by circumſtances, in their origin and their principles were preciſely ſimilar: but climate will ſometimes give them a phyſical alteration, and education and cuſtom a moral habitude. But in no people that ever exiſted in the world do we ſee the effects of law and cuſtom marked in

ſuch ſtrong and legible characters, as in the people of Iſrael.

Apud ipſos fides obſtinata, ſed adverſus omnes alios hoſtile odium [q], was the well known cenſure of Tacitus. But we need not go to the hiſtorians or the ſatiriſts of Rome, who deſpiſed and hated them, for a picture of their defects; out of the mouth of their own countrymen we may condemn them; their ſullen pride, their determined obſtinacy, and their bigotry, are the continual topics of cenſure and animated invectives, in all their Hiſtorians and all their Prophets; and in later times, the holy Apoſtle, who knew them well, declares, "that they pleaſed not God, and were contrary to all men [r]."

If we advert to the ſpirit, nay, even to the letter of the Moſaic Law, though all communion with idolaters was cut off, there was nothing that could be conſtrued into an approbation of want of friendſhip, or want of hoſpitality; nothing certainly that juſtifies enmity or hatred to the reſt

[q] Tacit. [r] 1 Theſſ. ii. 15.

of

of mankind. Let him forſake the worſhip of ſtrange Gods, and the ſtranger that ſojourned in the land[s] was to be loved and cheriſhed, as well as the deſcendant from the ſtock of Abraham; communion of Religion and religious privileges were denied to none; and the proſelyte of righteouſneſs, if he ſubmitted to the conditions of the covenant, became to all intents and purpoſes an Iſraelite, and was admitted to a participation of all the privileges of the nation.

But ſtill the real deſcendants of the Patriarch cheriſhed in their own minds a fancied ſuperiority over the convert, whoever he might be; the promiſes made to their anceſtors continually ſounded in their ears; that his name would be great, "that he would be a bleſſing and a great nation;" "that God would bleſs them that bleſſed him, and curſe them that curſed him;" "that nations and kings would come from him;" and that "in his ſeed all nations would be bleſſed[t]." As theſe promiſes they

[s] Levit. xvii. 33. xxv. 35. Numb. xv. 14.
[t] Gen. xii. 2.

con-

conſidered to be the baſis of their national eſtabliſhment, as they had been accompliſhed in part, by the rapid conqueſt and ſecure poſſeſſion of the land of Canaan, and as all their great leaders, and all their holy Prophets had taught them to attribute their ſucceſſes to the original covenant, they vainly and fooliſhly ſuppoſed that they ſhould be the lords of the univerſe, and that every nation under heaven would in time bow down before them.

From this falſe and miſtaken interpretation of the original promiſe, we may derive the pride and the ſelf-conceit which tempted the Iſraelites to look down upon the reſt of mankind, as a race inferior to themſelves; and this national vanity was ſtimulated and encouraged by fomenting the rivalſhip and jealouſy of the neighbouring nations; of the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Edomites, who ſtill contended for the birth-right of which their anceſtors had been defrauded; and the ſons of Iſhmael, who never forgot the ſtock from which they ſprang, or the rewards which were annexed to the obedience

dience of their great progenitor. It muſt be remembered too, that theſe nations, although connected with the Jews by ties of blood, were marked by a particular excluſion from the favoured church—that, in the caſe of the Moabites, three generations were to paſs away, and in the caſe of the Edomites, ten, before they could be admitted to the privileges of a proſelyte.

On theſe principles we may account for the pride and the bigotry of the Jewiſh people; and if it be true, that the human mind naturally attaches itſelf moſt to that which is continually before it, and that habit endears to us whatever is frequently repeated; there may be juſtice in the remark, that their tenacious obſtinacy aroſe from the burthenſome nature of their ritual, and the continual repetition of its ceremonies.

But even the vices and the faults in their character, which aroſe perhaps from their miſtaking the object of their inſtitutions, aided the deſigns of Providence, by keeping up the great national diſtinction, till

till the end of the ſeparation was attained: but at the ſame time they deluded the unfortunate people, and taught them to expect permanency and immutability in that which was intended to anſwer a temporary purpoſe.

That in the days of our Saviour, when their Temple was ſtill ſtanding, and their ceremonial Law in full force, when even our Lord himſelf conformed to its cuſtoms, and its ceremonies—that the Jews of that time ſhould have argued from the expreſſions of their Legiſlator, that their Law would be everlaſting, may not perhaps be thought ſo wonderful: but what has a modern Jew to urge, as a reaſon for his obſtinate adherence to the inſtitutions of Moſes?

Chriſtian writers have again and again unanſwerably proved from the uſage of the Hebrew language, and the general analogy of all languages, that when the perpetuity of the Moſaic Law is ſpoken of, the expreſſions can only mean that it ſhould laſt for a long time, as long as the nature

nature and deſign of the inſtitution would allow: indeed, if Canaan was given to the people of Iſrael for an "everlaſting poſſeſſion," and they have long ceaſed to poſſeſs it, it is abſurd to infer that the Law was to be of perpetual obligation, becauſe it is ſaid, that it ſhould endure for ever.

But I would aſk the modern Jew in the firſt inſtance, What was the great object of the ceremonial Law? To ſeparate the people, he will ſay, from communication with idolaters, and to leave the worſhip of the true God undefiled. Doubtleſs it was ſo; the ſtrange deviations of mankind from the truths revealed to the Patriarchs, made it neceſſary.

"The Law was added," ſays the Apoſtle, "becauſe of tranſgreſſions [u]." This being acknowledged, what is its uſe when idolatry has ceaſed, when the ſound of the Heathen oracles has long been huſhed, the ſtatues of their corrupt Deities have been crumbled to the duſt, and all the ci-

[u] Galat. iii. 19.

vilized

vilized nations of the world unite in the adoration of the one true God?

Then I would aſk him, whether in their Law, which he aſſerts to be immutable, there were not actually changes made, as the time approached at which the obligation was to ceaſe, and all its partial diſtinctions to be done away?

Before the building of the ſecond Temple, God enlarged the boundaries of his church; he admitted into its communion thoſe whom legal impediments or natural diſtinctions had before excluded from it. "My ſalvation," ſays the Holy Spirit, "is near to come, and my righteouſneſs to be revealed[x]. Let not the ſon of the ſtranger ſay, The Lord hath utterly ſeparated me from his people; neither let the eunuch ſay, Behold, I am a dry tree[y]; for even unto thee will I give in mine houſe, and within my walls, a place and a name better than of ſons and of daughters; I will give them an everlaſting name, that ſhall not be cut off[z]."

[x] Iſaiah lvi. 1. [y] Iſaiah lvi. 3. [z] Iſaiah lvi. 5.

At

At the ſame time a change was announced in the mode of God's government; for the iniquities of the fathers were no more to be puniſhed upon the children, but every one was to bear his own ſins: it was alſo declared, that the external and poſitive duties of ſacrifice and oblations were inferior to the inward and unbidden worſhip of the heart, and that "God deſired mercy and not ſacrifice[a]," and the knowledge of God more than burnt offering.

If theſe material alterations are not ſufficient to prove that the whole was a preparatory diſpenſation, and conſequently might ceaſe when its object was accompliſhed; let him advert to the circumſtances of his people; they no longer dwell alone, but are ſcattered abroad over the face of the earth; they are no longer the "habitation of the Lord;" nor do they dwell in ſafety under "his everlaſting arms[b];" all the diſtinctions, which would now be uſeleſs, are gone; the genealogies, which they once preſerved with ſuch anxious care, are

[a] Hoſea vi. 6. [b] Deut. xxxiii. 27.

con-

confounded with each other, and the tribe of Judah is mingled and loſt in the common maſs of their countrymen[c].

Thus their temporal and their ſpiritual ſtate, which were in fact one and the ſame thing, which gradually roſe together to the height of their fame and ſplendour, were both deſtroyed when the purpoſe of their eſtabliſhment was fulfilled.

Laſtly, let him recollect, that the whole of his worſhip, as I have before remarked, was local; that all its duties were to be performed at Jeruſalem, and no where elſe. If then the holy country be trodden under foot by aliens and ſtrangers; if the holy Temple be deſtroyed; if all traces of its exiſtence have long been gone, and all attempts to reſtore it have proved fruitleſs and abortive; is it not time for him to confeſs that the hour is really arrived, when "God is not to be worſhipped on mount Gerizim[d], or at Jeruſalem," but in the hearts of all his creatures?

[c] Newton on the Prophecies, vol. i. p. 215.
[d] Judges ix. 7. John xxi. 21.

SER-

SERMON IV.

COLOSSIANS ii. 17.

WHICH ARE A SHADOW OF GOOD THINGS TO COME, BUT THE BODY IS OF CHRIST.

HAVING already explained for what purpoſe the Almighty ſeparated the Jewiſh nation from the reſt of mankind, and by what methods that ſeparation was effected, the courſe of my argument leads me to examine what ſort of connexion there was between the religious inſtitutions of the Jews, and the eſſential doctrines of Chriſtianity; and in what ſenſe, and under what limitations, the former

are to be conſidered as Figures and Types of the latter.

The Apoſtle in this Epiſtle to the Coloſſians takes great pains to caution the Jewiſh converts againſt a practice, in thoſe days very common, of mixing and uniting the complicated ritual of Moſes with the ſpiritual precepts and the ſimpler ſacraments of Chriſt. He tells them, that the Goſpel into which they had been baptized was all in all; that it contained "all the treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge;" that they were "complete in Chriſt," in whom dwelt all the fulneſs of the Godhead bodily[a]; and that as they were not to be ſeduced by the falſe theories of Greek and Oriental philoſophy, ſo they were to pay no heed to the bigoted Iſraelite, when he attempted to impoſe upon them the burthenſome yoke of uſeleſs ceremonies; of laws which Chriſt had abrogated, and of rites, which, as they were nothing more than images and ſhadows of the truth, conſequently were of no avail to thoſe who poſſeſſed the reality and the ſub-

[a] Col. ii. 9.

ſtance.

ſtance. "Let no man judge you," ſays he, "in meat, or drink, or in reſpect of an holy day, or the new moon, or of ſabbaths, which are a ſhadow of things to come, but the body is of Chriſt [b]."

The Apoſtolic Epiſtles abound with expreſſions of a ſimilar tendency. The prieſts under the Law are ſaid "to ſerve unto the ſhadow of heavenly things [c];" the Law itſelf is ſaid to have "a ſhadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things [d];" the tabernacle and its decorations are called the patterns or copies, ὑποδείγματα, of heavenly things; and Chriſt is declared to have entered not "into the holy places made with hands, which are the Figures or Antitypes of the true, but into heaven itſelf [e]."

Now when the Apoſtles make uſe of ſuch expreſſions as theſe, when they ſtyle the Law of Moſes, or rather the Levitical part of the Moſaic Law, a ſhadow, a figure, or a type of future good things, and

[b] Col. ii. 16.
[c] Heb. ii. 5.
[d] Heb. x. 1.
[e] Heb. ix. 24.

Chriſt the body, the ſubſtance, and the truth, do they mean merely to urge the ſuperiority of Chriſtianity over Judaiſm, of the Goſpel over the Law, and the ſacrifice of Jeſus over the ſtated ſacrifices of the Aaronic prieſthood? Or do they mean, that the ordinances of the Moſaic diſpenſation were deſigned by God to prefigure future events in the hiſtory of our Saviour, and to repreſent, under the ſhade of allegory, thoſe myſterious truths of his religion which were not to be revealed till the "fulneſs of time" arrived?

In the very infancy of Chriſtianity the Commentators of the Goſpel began to indulge themſelves in the licence of allegorical and myſtical interpretations. The Jews in their Targums (which almoſt ſuperſeded the uſe of the original books of the Law) had long been in the habit of accommodating the obſcurities of their Scriptures to their own viſionary notions; of drawing parallels, which in all probability never were deſigned; and of diſcovering ſimilitudes, which at all times it is eaſy to

to trace in the analogous operations of nature, and ſtill eaſier to imagine where they do not exiſt; and, after their example, ſome of the Greek Fathers gave the reins to their imaginations, and wandered far away from the obvious and literal meaning of Scripture phraſeology.

From hence it has happened, that whilſt infidel writers have blaſphemed the word of God, as if it contained nothing but doubtful phraſes, and unſubſtantial allegories, upon which no certain dependance could be placed, believers of cool and temperate judgments have been fearful of admitting any figurative interpretations whatever, and have tenaciouſly adhered to the literal meaning of a text, even where it ſeems clearly to have been inſerted by the Holy Spirit for the ſake of the application to be made of it in later times.

In this, as in all other caſes, the truth lies betwen the two extremes; and it is of material importance, that we may not either abuſe or reject any portion of the light which God hath mercifully given us, to aſ-

certain, as accurately as can be done in a caſe of great nicety, what types really are, upon what grounds it is that they have a place in the preparatory diſpenſation of the Jews, and what degree of force they may fairly and juſtly be allowed to have as evidences of the truth of Chriſtianity.

In its primitive and original meaning, a type is merely the pattern, or impreſſion, the rough draught, or ſketch, from which a more perfect work is made: in this ſenſe the word is uſed by the ſacred writers. Our tranſlators have given a variety of interpretations of the Greek word τύπος: in St. John's Goſpel it is rendered by the word Print; "Except I ſhall ſee in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, I will not believe[f]:" in the Acts of the Apoſtles it is tranſlated a Figure, or Model: in St. Paul's Epiſtle to the Romans, the term Form is uſed—"That form of doctrine which was delivered to you[g]:" and in the courſe of the Apoſtolical Epiſtles it is continually tranſlated, Example; "Now all theſe things

[f] John xx. 25.

[g] Rom. vi. 17.

hap-

happened unto them for examples[h];" "Now theſe things were our examples[i];" and "Mark them which walk ſo as ye have us for an example[k]."

It is evident, that in all theſe paſſages, though the expreſſion varies, the ſame idea of a Pattern, a Copy, of ſomething to be copied or imitated, is ſtill preſerved; and no clearer notion can be formed of the connexion which ſubſiſts between the Type and its Antitype, than by comparing it with the ſimilitude, which may be traced between the firſt general delineation of a picture, and the picture completely finiſhed[l]."

The language of the firſt ſimple ages of mankind was neceſſarily very imperfect and defective. Time and Experience and Philoſophy have taught us to expreſs in words every poſſible combination of human thought, and all the varieties of human affections and paſſions: but it was not ſo with the primitive ages. As yet unaccuſtomed to reflect, to abſtract and

[h] 1 Cor. v. 7. [i] 1 Cor. x. 6. [k] Phil. iii. 17.
[l] Jortin's Remarks on Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory, vol. i.

to generalize their ideas, they had nothing to repreſent by their ſymbols of ſpeech, but the common neceſſities, and the ordinary employments of life; and when any thing farther was requiſite, when they had occaſion to ſpeak of any thing out of the beaten track of their uſual wants and occupations, it was not to be done by words, but by ſome material ſign, ſome ſenſible image taken from the objects that immediately ſurrounded them: thus aroſe a mode of communication by ſigns or by action, which amply ſupplied the deficiencies of language, and enabled mankind, in the earlieſt periods of ſociety, to communicate to each other thoſe ideas for which as yet they had invented no ſignificant words.

This ſpecies of language was coeval with the origin of mankind; its uſe is founded in nature, and in the natural wants of man: but in proceſs of time, what was originally dictated by neceſſity, was preſerved by choice, was embodied into a regular ſyſtem, and guided by fixed rules and determinate principles.

When-

Whenever the Almighty vouchſafes to deliver his inſtructions to mankind, the mode in which they are delivered is always mercifully accommodated to the character of the people who are to receive them—to their popular opinions, to their cuſtoms, and their circumſtances: for this reaſon it is that the inſpired writings, both of the Old and New Teſtament, abound in every page with that method of communicating information by external ſigns, and ſenſible repreſentations, to which the Jews had long been attached by inclination, and familiarized by habit.

It frequently happened, that when the Prophet wiſhed to impreſs more forcibly upon the minds of his hearers the expectation of ſome approaching event, he drew his parable, or his ſign, from the ſurrounding objects, preciſely in the ſame way that our bleſſed Lord himſelf was accuſtomed to enforce his holy leſſons, by a fable, or an allegory, framed from the circumſtances of the moment, from the time of the year, from the place in which he was, or from the characters and the employments of the

perſons

perſons to whom he was ſpeaking. Thus it was that the holy Samuel ſignified to Saul by the rent in his garment, that the kingdom of Iſrael would in that day be torn from him[m]; and thus the Prophet Iſaiah, by an alluſion to the Sabbatic year, exemplified to Hezekiah the conqueſt of the Jews by Sennacherib, and their ſubſequent return to Jeruſalem[n]. Sometimes the Prophet himſelf, in his own perſon acted the event which the Spirit of God empowered him to foreſee; thus, by breaking in pieces a potter's veſſel, Jeremiah prefigured to the Jews the utter deſtruction of their city[o]—by putting on yokes and fetters, he foretold to the princes of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, their future defeat, and their ſubjection to the king of Babylon[p]—by binding the book of his Prophecy to a ſtone, and caſting them both into the Euphrates, he announced that Babylon ſhould ſink, and never riſe from the evil that was to be brought upon her[q]. In the ſame manner the Prophet Iſaiah, by the name which he gives to his child, fore-

[m] 1 Sam. xv. 27. [n] Iſai. xxxvii. 30. [o] Jer. xix.
[p] Jer. xxvii. [q] Jer. li.

tels,

tels, that the riches of Damaſcus and the ſpoil of Samaria ſhall be ſeized by the Aſſyrians [r]. And Ezekiel, by going forth in the dreſs, and with the trembling action of a captive, exemplified the conqueſt of Zedekiah, and the ſlavery of his people in Babylon [s].

Such were the methods by which the Prophets of God inſtructed their countrymen. But it ſometimes happened, that the Holy Spirit, in compliance with the common and familiar uſage of the Jewiſh people, adopted the ſame method of conveying its revelations to the Prophet himſelf. Thus, for inſtance, the Prophet Jeremiah is ordered to behold "the rod of the almond-tree, and the ſeething-pot [t];" and to the Prophet Ezekiel is ſhewn "the reſurrection of the dry bones [u]."

It is needleſs to multiply inſtances; they are to be found in every part of the Prophetical books; and, it is evident, that wherever they occur, there is always the

[r] Iſai. viii. 3, 4.
[s] Ezek. xii. 8.
[t] Jer. i. 11. 13.
[u] Ezek. xxxvii.

notion

notion of futurity, ſomething is repreſented that is to happen at a greater or leſs diſtance of time; and this is the eſſential character of a type, and conſtitutes the difference between the type and the ſymbol. A Horn, for inſtance, in the language of Scripture, denotes ſtrength; "an Eye, or a Sceptre," majeſty; the Planets, empires and ſtates: but in theſe emblematic repreſentations there is no idea of futurity, or of future events implied, conſequently they are not types, but ſymbols.

So far then we have conſidered the general character of types, and the uſe which the Prophets frequently made of them, to prefigure to the Jews the viciſſitudes which took place from time to time in their temporal circumſtances: from thence it is eaſy to proceed to thoſe actions or thoſe ceremonies in the œconomy of Judaiſm, which we ſuppoſe to have been preparatory repreſentations of Chriſt and his Goſpel.

Chriſtian writers have divided theſe types into three claſſes, 1ſt, the remarkable events in the hiſtory of the Jewiſh people; 2dly, the

the characters of illuſtrious perſons, Patriarchs, Kings, or Conquerors; and 3dly, the rites and ceremonies of their Religion. But it is abſolutely neceſſary, that we may not be loſt in the labyrinth of fanciful analogies and abſurd compariſons, which are the delight of fanatics and enthuſiaſts, to fix ſome determinate boundary, ſome certain criterion, by which we can eſtimate the real value of an argument, drawn from typical analogy: and what can this criterion be, but the authority of inſpiration? Admitting then that other ſimilitudes, and other paralleliſms, may have the appearance of reaſon, and may perhaps be juſt, we cannot ſurely be wrong in refuſing to acknowledge any circumſtance in the Old Teſtament to be a ſhadow or token of Chriſt, unleſs the writers of the New Teſtament have declared it to be ſo.

In the Jewiſh hiſtory doubtleſs there is a ſtriking analogy, an analogy pointed out and illuſtrated by the Apoſtles themſelves, between many of the moſt miraculous events, and the general ſtate of mankind, and their particular ſituation under the Goſpel

Goſpel covenant; between their ſervitude in Egypt for inſtance, and the tyranny of ſin; between their baptiſm in the ſea and in the cloud, and the baptiſmal rite of Chriſtianity; between their ſufferings during their paſſage through the wilderneſs, and the temptations, trials, and difficulties of the preſent world; between the Sabbath of reſt promiſed to them in the temporal poſſeſſion of Canaan, and the eternal reſt to be enjoyed hereafter in Heaven: in all theſe circumſtances there is an analogy and a correſpondence, which we cannot well ſuppoſe to have taken place accidentally, or without the deſign and determined purpoſe of the Almighty.

It was at all times the delight of the Jewiſh people, to trace reſemblances between the moſt diſtinguiſhed of their countrymen and the glorious Meſſiah, who, in the latter age of the world, was to conduct them to power and preeminence above the reſt of mankind. But theſe reſemblances, with whatever ingenuity they may be diſcovered, or to whatever degree of minuteneſs they may be carried, want, for the moſt

moſt part, the neceſſary ſanction of inſpiration. The father indeed of the human race is declared by the Apoſtle to be the "figure of him who was to come[x]:" but of the reſt, of Joſeph, Sampſon, or Joſhua, no ſuch declaration is made; and although it muſt be allowed, that there is a ſtriking ſimilitude between the events of their lives, and the character, office, and circumſtances of the Meſſiah, yet we cannot venture to pronounce, that the former were deſigned to repreſent or prefigure the latter.

But if we go on from hiſtorical facts and diſtinguiſhed perſons, to the Ceremonies of the Jewiſh Law, the ſimilitudes become more obvious and more ſatisfactory.

The ceremonial Precepts of the Moſaic Law relate either to the worſhip of God, and the daily ſervice of the Temple; or to the perſons of the people, and their conduct in life. Of the latter, the principal object was, as we have ſeen upon a former

[x] Rom. v. 14.

occaſion,

occaſion, by a diſtinction of dreſs, of diet, and of occupation, to keep up the great ſeparation, "the partition-wall," between the people of Iſrael and the nations who ſurrounded them. Whether beſides this object, under the covert of ablutions and purifications, it was not deſigned to enforce the neceſſity of inward purity and moral virtue, is a queſtion foreign to our preſent diſcuſſion, which muſt be confined merely to the ritual of their worſhip.

The Temple at Jeruſalem was a copy of that Tabernacle which Moſes built by the command of God in the Wilderneſs, from the heavenly model exhibited to him in the mount. In the outer part, the Prieſts performed the daily functions of their miniſtry; but into the holy Sanctuary, which the Jews conſidered as a ſymbol of heaven, the High Prieſt went alone, annually, with blood to atone for the ſins of the people—a circumſtance deſigned, it ſhould ſeem, to prefigure the one oblation and ſatisfaction to be made by Chriſt, who, after his death, was to reaſcend to the glory which he had with the Father before the worlds.

It

It can ſcarcely be ſuppoſed, that the ſtriking ſimilitude between the ſacrifice of the Paſchal Lamb and the ſacrifice of our Redeemer was accidental: let us attend to the circumſtances. Chriſt was ſlain on the ſame day that the Paſchal Lamb was; no bones of either were broken; as the Lamb was without ſpot or blemiſh, ſo was Chriſt without ſin: and as the blood of the Lamb ſprinkled on the door-poſts was a token and memorial of deliverance from the ſlaughter of the firſt-born; ſo the blood of Chriſt purchaſed for us a ſpiritual deliverance from the thraldom of ſin and iniquity.

But if this reſemblance between the Paſſover and the death of our Lord be far the moſt ſtriking that can be produced, it is equally certain, however, that all the legal ſacrifices, whether they were completed within or without the camp, whether they were offered as an atonement for the ſins of the community at large, on the great day of expiation; or for the ſins of particular families or individuals, upon the commiſſion of the offence; inſomuch as they contained

the principle of expiation, and atonement, and redemption from ſin, they all repreſented the future death of Chriſt; and upon this account it may not appear perhaps ſo extravagant an expreſſion as has been ſuppoſed, to aſſert, that the Goſpel is contained in the Law; for the ceremonial part of the Moſaic Law was, in fact, a conſtant alluſion to the Goſpel; and there is no reaſon, *primâ facie*, why it ſhould not be ſo: on the contrary, there is every reaſon from the nature of the caſe to ſuppoſe, that a diſpenſation, which was a preparation and rudiment for a better and more perfect ſyſtem to come, would contain in its inſtitutions, frequent tokens and indications to that future ſyſtem.

Chriſtianity and Judaiſm, it muſt ever be remembered, are not independent, unconnected ſyſtems of Religion, but mutually dependent on each other, as parts of the ſame general ſcheme of Providence, for the happineſs of man. Succeſſive Revelations, if they are really Divine, muſt be neceſſarily ſucceſſive diſcoveries of truth; conſequently they cannot contradict each other,

they

they cannot be inconſiſtent with each other. But in the gradual communication of truth, what is at firſt ſeen faintly and obſcurely, will, in proceſs of time, become gradually clearer, till at length the day-ſpring from on high breaks forth upon us in all its luſtre.

God hath vouchſafed, at different times, to make two covenants with his creatures: the one carnal, ſanctioned by temporal promiſes, and enjoining the performance of a multitude of external ordinances; the other ſpiritual, applying to the heart and underſtanding, and raiſing our thoughts beyond the frivolous concerns of our preſent tranſitory exiſtence, to the enjoyment of a boundleſs eternity. But however different they might be in form, in inſtitution, and in ceremonies, in ſubſtance the two covenants are the ſame; the great deſign of both was the ſame; the Mediator of both was the ſame; and the vital principle of both, faith in the power and the promiſes of God.

To redeem mankind from the puniſhment of death which they had incurred,

and to reſtore them to immortality, was the one great ſcheme of Providence; for this gracious purpoſe, Chriſt was to ſuffer death upon the croſs. The time at which this awful event was to happen, and the ſteps which were gradually to lead to its accompliſhment, were all fixed by God, long before the ratification of the firſt covenant, before even the act of creation itſelf. So the Apoſtles ſpeak of the great myſtery of Chriſtianity: "The wiſdom of God," ſays St. Paul, "is a myſtery, even the hidden wiſdom which God ordained before the world to our glory [y];" and "ye are not redeemed with corruptible things," ſays St. Peter, "but with the precious blood of Chriſt, who was pre-ordained before the foundation of the world [z]." So alſo St. John ſays, that "the Lamb of God was ſlain from the foundation of the world [a]."

That the holy Jeſus therefore ſhould make an atonement for the ſins of mankind, by a voluntary oblation of himſelf upon the croſs, was from all eternity the

[y] 1 Cor. ii. 7. [z] 1 Pet. i. 18. 20. [a] Rev. xiii. 8.

purpoſe

purpoſe of Almighty wiſdom. In the Divine mind, the whole myſterious ſcheme extending throughout all ages, from the very commencement of time to the final conſummation of all things, was comprehended under one point of view, as one complete and perfect plan. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning[b]." To man, the diſpenſations of God preſent themſelves in detached parts, and with different degrees of clearneſs or obſcurity; and even now we comprehend them imperfectly. To God there can be no varieties of knowledge, and no gradations of time.

But though the certain knowledge of this precious ſacrifice was reſerved for the latter days, it was at all times operating continually to produce the bleſſed effects of Sanctification and Redemption. The righteous Patriarchs before the promulgation of the Law, and all holy and religious men under the Law, were juſtified, as we are, by the free gift of God, through the mediation of Chriſt. "Abraham[c]," they are the words of our Saviour himſelf, "Abra-

[b] Acts xv. 18. [c] John viii. 56.

ham rejoiced to ſee the day of Chriſt;" and we with reaſon ſuppoſe, that he ſaw it typically in the intended ſacrifice of his own ſon. "He believed," we are told, "and his faith was counted unto him for righteouſneſs [d]." St. Paul tells the Corinthians, that "the Fathers were all under the cloud, and were baptized in the ſea, and did eat the ſame ſpiritual meat, and drank of the ſpiritual Rock," following them, "and that Rock was Chriſt [e]."

The Fathers therefore were all juſtified, not by their own works, or by their own righteouſneſs, but by the all-ſufficient merits of the ſacrifice of Jeſus Chriſt, "the ſame yeſterday, and to-day, and for ever [f]."

In what way the future death of the Redeemer could operate, ſo as to ſave thoſe who died before he came into the world, it is preſumptuous in man to inquire; it is amongſt the deep and hidden counſels of the Almighty: it is enough for us that it did ſo; and it is certainly conſiſtent with our notions of the goodneſs of God, to ſuppoſe that it would do ſo; that faith, under every

[d] Gen. xv. 6. [e] 1 Cor. x. 1—4. [f] Heb. xiii. 8.

diſ-

diſpenſation, would operate unto ſalvation; and that at all times a repentant ſinner would receive pardon and remiſſion of ſins, provided that he performed the ſacrificatory rites, and complied with the acts of obedience which the diſpenſation under which he lived, and the ſtate of his knowledge, enabled him to perform; "for every law doth ſpeak to thoſe which live under it."

And this being the caſe, it is unqueſtionably conſiſtent with the uſual method which God takes to inſtruct mankind, that ceremonies which were only to be temporary, and ſacrifices which were only to atone partially for the ſins of a particular people, and in that people only for ſins of a particular deſcription, ſhould, in their form and all external circumſtances, repreſent the great and final ſacrifice, whoſe efficacy was to be univerſal and endure to the end of time.

That God ſhould thus foreſhew to his choſen people thoſe truths which it was not poſſible at the time fully to reveal to them by a mode of inſtruction familiar to their

conceptions, and adapted to their capacities, by material repreſentations, is no more difficult to conceive, than that he ſhould impower his Prophets to repreſent the future glories of Chriſt's kingdom, by expreſſions and deſcriptions taken from the fertility, the opulence, and the ſplendor of their temporal poſſeſſions; or that he ſhould compel them, by the impulſe of his Holy Spirit, to anticipate the triumphs of the Meſſiah, and the univerſal extent of his dominion, when perhaps they imagined themſelves, that they were merely celebrating the triumphs and the proſperity of David, or Solomon, or Zerubbabel.

If ſuch then be the nature of types in general, and ſuch the principle upon which it is reaſonable to ſuppoſe that they would have a place in the general œconomy of the Divine diſpenſations, it only remains for us to conſider, how far we may juſtly reaſon from them, and in what way they may be produced as evidences of the truth of Chriſtianity.

No perſon, I apprehend, would attempt to

to make a convert to the Chriſtian faith, by typical reaſoning; he would argue indeed from Prophecy; he would ſhew him whom he wiſhed to convince, that the appearance of an extraordinary perſon upon earth had been foretold from the very beginning of the world; that the time of his coming, his character, his office, and his death, had been minutely deſcribed. He would tell him that Chriſt claimed to be this perſon, and that he ſupported his claim by acts of ſuperhuman power, and this would amount to proof.

A Prophecy accompliſhed by the event is a proof; a Type is not, however exact the ſimilitude may be; and they who attempt to give to types the importance of direct demonſtrative proofs, neither underſtand their nature nor their real uſe. Did the Jews themſelves, we may aſk, ever at any period of their hiſtory previous to the birth of Chriſt, imagine that their Law and its ordinances were typical repreſentations of their Meſſiah, and that the ſacrifices of the Aaronic prieſthood were prophetical repreſentations of the atonement for ſin to be made by him?

That

That men of religious minds, who ſtudied their Law with devout hearts, and really wiſhed to diſcover the will of God, might ſee and underſtand the inefficacy of their own ſacrifices, cannot be denied: "without ſhedding of blood they knew there could be no remiſſion of ſins[g]" whatever. "Fleſh with the life thereof, which is the blood, their anceſtors had been forbidden to eat[h];" and in the volume of their Law they were told, that it was death to eat the blood, becauſe God had reſerved it for the altar, to make an atonement for their ſouls. "For it is the blood," ſays the Law, "that maketh an atonement for the ſoul[i];" at the ſame time, even the ſhedding of blood did not expiate for all ſins. The ſin-offering and the treſpaſs-offering expiated ſins of ignorance, and ſins of inferior magnitude: but there were ſins for which no ſuch expiation could be made; Idolatry, for inſtance, and contempt of the Law of Moſes: they were to be puniſhed with death without mercy. Upon ſuch occaſions, therefore, we can ſcarcely conceive, but that ſerious and pious men muſt have raiſed their thoughts to ſome

[g] Heb. ix. 22. [h] Lev. xvii. 14. [i] Lev. xvii. 11.

higher

higher and better atonement, to be granted, as the Holy Pſalmiſt expreſſes it, "by the loving-kindneſs of God, and the multitude of his tender mercies[k]."

From their own Prophets too they muſt have learnt to expect a change in their legal ceremonies, and the introduction of another ſyſtem, otherwiſe they muſt have ſuppoſed a ſtrange inconſiſtency in the word of God. For although God preſcribes and regulates the ſacrifice, the Holy Spirit is continually expreſſing diſpleaſure and diſlike of it. "To what purpoſe is the multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? I delight not in the blood of bulls, and of lambs, and of he-goats; your new moons and your appointed feaſts my ſoul hateth; they are a trouble to me, I am weary to bear them[l]." The prophet Daniel expreſsly tells them, that the time would come, when the ſacrifice and the oblation ſhould ceaſe[m]. And both Iſaiah and Daniel, when they are painting in lofty terms, and ſplendid imagery, the expected Chriſt, and the glories of his kingdom, declare, that he

[k] Pſalm lxix. 16. [l] Iſa. i. 11—14. [m] Dan. ix. 27.

will

will be both the prieſt and the victim at the ſame time. And yet the Jews certainly did not conclude from hence, that their Meſſiah was to die, to atone for their ſins, and not only for theirs, but for the ſins of the whole world. If, from the opinion of the earlier Jews, we advert to the practice of our bleſſed Lord himſelf, and of thoſe inſpired perſons to whom he committed the care of his infant church, we do not find that they ever inſiſt upon types as direct proofs; that they place them upon a level, for inſtance, with the two great proofs of the truth of Chriſtianity, the accompliſhment of Scriptural prophecy, and the diſplay of miracles. St. Paul in his Epiſtle to the Hebrew converts (if at leaſt I may be permitted to attribute to that holy Apoſtle a compoſition which is ſtamped with the ſtrongeſt characters both of his eloquence and his mode of arguing) is drawing throughout a compariſon between the Law of Moſes and the Goſpel of Chriſt. His object is to perſuade the converts to perſevere in the faith into which they had been baptized. Some of them had been ſeduced by the ſubtle reaſoning of

of Jewiſh teachers; and the firmneſs of others had been ſhaken by diſtreſs, and trials, and perſecutions: the Apoſtle therefore is labouring to inſpire them with fortitude, by painting on the one part the glorious rewards of unſhaken conſtancy; and on the other, the dangers and the puniſhments which are reſerved for apoſtacy. With this view he enters into a minute compariſon of the two covenants, he points out the circumſtances of reſemblance and coincidence in each, and deduces from thence the infinite ſuperiority of the Goſpel above the Law. The Law was given by the miniſtry of angels; the Goſpel, by the Son of God; the brightneſs of his glory, and the expreſs image of his perſon. The ceremonies of the Law were adminiſtered to the Jews by a ſucceſſion of mortal men: the Goſpel had one High Prieſt, even Jeſus the Son of God, who was inveſted with an eternal and unchangeable prieſthood; a prieſthood reſembling not that of Aaron, but of Melchiſedeck, who was both a King and the Prieſt of the moſt High God. The firſt covenant had its ordinances, its tabernacle, and its

ſanc-

ſanctuary; but "Jeſus Chriſt is gone into a better tabernacle, into a temple not made with hands, into heaven itſelf[n]." Under the Law, the blood of bulls and of goats was ſhed to atone for tranſgreſſions; but Jeſus Chriſt hath offered up himſelf once for all, and by his own blood hath entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. Who then, is the concluſion of the Apoſtle, would quit a more excellent and more perfect Religion, to return to one leſs perfect, and leſs efficacious? Or if tranſgreſſion and diſobedience under the latter received their juſt puniſhment, who can ſuppoſe that it is not in the higheſt degree criminal to reject the ſalvation offered by the former? In all this compariſon which the Apoſtle makes, which in fact is a compariſon between the Type and its Antitype; between the rough draught or ſhadow of good things to come, and the ſubſtance of thoſe very good things; there is nothing like an attempt to prove the truth of the Goſpel, from the figurative character of the Law: on the contrary, the Apoſtle expreſsly

[n] Heb. ix. 11—24.

calls

calls upon the Hebrews, to leave the principles of the doctrine of Chriſt, and to go on unto perfection; not to return again to the elements, to the fundamental arguments, and the neceſſary evidences of their faith, which he ſtates to be the doctrine of repentance, of faith in God, of baptiſm, of the reſurrection of the dead, and of the eternal Judgment[o]. This therefore is the nature of his argument; it was addreſſed, we know, to Jews, and to thoſe who, having embraced Chriſtianity, wiſhed to return to Judaiſm. You prefer, he would ſay, the Law of Moſes to the Goſpel of Chriſt; but why do ye ſo? For your Law was evidently defective in the one great point of redemption from ſin. Could your legal ſacrifices have atoned effectually for ſin, would it have been neceſſary to repeat them ſo often? Would not one expiation have been ſufficient? And then would they not have ceaſed to be offered? But your Prieſts daily miniſter in the Temple, and offer repeatedly the ſame ſacrifices, which can never take away ſin; they are only to be looked upon therefore as the fi-

[o] Heb. vi. 1, 2.

gures

gures or ſhadows, by which the Holy Ghoſt ſignified a more perfect ſacrifice to be made hereafter. That ſacrifice is made; Jeſus Chriſt hath offered himſelf without ſpot unto God for us; he is our Paſſover, which is ſacrificed for us; he is the very Lamb of God, which taketh away the ſins of the world, and by one ſacrifice he hath perfected for ever them that are ſanctified[p].

The doctrine of the Apoſtle throughout the whole of the Epiſtle is evidently this, that the ſacrifices of the Law were alluſions to the great and final atonement to be made by the blood of Chriſt: and though the Apoſtle does not tell us ſo, we may venture to conclude, that the deſign of God in prefiguring the death of our Saviour by the tokens and ſhadows of the Law, was to facilitate the promulgation of Chriſtianity, and to prepare the Jewiſh nation, and through them the whole race of man, for the awful and myſterious doctrines of Sanctification, and Redemption, and adoption to eternal life. Our bleſſed Redeemer himſelf, it may be obſerved, when

[p] Heb. x. 14.

he

he is celebrating the laſt Paſchal Supper with his diſciples, uſes the very form of expreſſion which the Jewiſh lawgiver was commanded by God to uſe, when he ratified the covenant of the Law. "Drink ye all of this, ſaid he; for this is my blood of the New Teſtament, which is ſhed for you for the remiſſion of ſins[q];" as Moſes, when he took the book of the covenant, ſprinkled it with blood, and ſaid, "This is the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you[r]." And when a Jew heard that Chriſt was an High Prieſt, "a propitiatory ſacrifice," and "the very Lamb of God;" when he was told that "he ſuffered for ſins," "the juſt for the unjuſt," that "he gave his life, himſelf a ranſom," that "he redeemed us with his blood," and "by his death deſtroyed him that had the power of death;" the ideas raiſed in his mind by ſuch expreſſions were familiar to him; they were the firſt and earlieſt leſſon of his childhood: the conſtant habits of his life, his daily employments, and his hourly meditations, indelibly fixed them in his memory; and he

[q] Matt. xxvi. 27. [r] Exod. xxiv. 8.

had, in fact, only to transfer to Chriſt and his Goſpel the notions which he had derived from Moſes and his Law.

By the follower of Moſes typical reaſoning would be more readily admitted, and more acutely inveſtigated, than it would by the Gentile convert; but its real uſe was the ſame to both, not as in itſelf a ſufficient evidence of the truth of Chriſtianity, but as a valuable acceſſion to neceſſary and fundamental proofs, a confirmation of truths which the mind had already received, and an illuſtration of myſterious doctrines, which would otherwiſe have been perfectly new and ſtrange to their conceptions. At the ſame time, it muſt be remembered, which is in truth the reaſon why I have dwelt ſo long upon the ſubject, that that ſort of analogy upon which the uſe of types in the Old Teſtament, and their application in the New, depends, is to all men alike, to the Jew or the Gentile, to the convert of the Apoſtolic age, or the confirmed Chriſtian of our times, a clear and deciſive proof of the unity of God's deſign; it convinces us, that the

the gracious purpoſe of man's redemption and reſtoration to eternal life was never forgotten; that, in every ſtate of religious knowledge, indications of it were given, conformable to the circumſtances of the times, and correſponding with the method of inſtruction then in uſe; and that whatever ordinances God thought fit to preſcribe, either to the Patriarchs before the Law, or their poſterity under the Law, "Chriſt was in fact the end of them all, for righteouſneſs, unto every one that believeth[s]."

[s] Rom. x. 4.

SERMON V.

ACTS x. 43.

TO HIM GIVE ALL THE PROPHETS WITNESS.

IT was the will of God, that the religion, which in his good time was to become univerſal, ſhould be announced to the world long before its actual publication in two ways; figuratively, by the ceremonies of the Moſaical Law; and literally, by the deſcriptions of the holy Prophets, who ſpake as the ſpirit of God directed them.

Of the firſt of theſe two methods of previous repreſentation, I have attempted

in my former diſcourſe to explain the true and legitimate uſe; I now proceed with a more aſſured ſtep, and leſs apprehenſion of error, to point out the origin of the ſecond, and to trace its progreſs, from its earlieſt commencement to its ceſſation in the Jewiſh Church.

In the addreſſes of our bleſſed Lord to the Jews of his days, one of the characters, which he conſtantly aſſumes to himſelf, is this, that he is the perſon of whom Moſes in the Law, and the Prophets, did write: "I that ſpeak unto thee *Am He*[a]," is his own emphatical expreſſion to the woman of Samaria: and when, after his reſurrection, he is converſing with the two diſciples who knew him not, he ſpeaks of his own actions, and his own ſufferings, as being neceſſary, becauſe they had been foretold; he ſays, "O fools, and ſlow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have written! Ought not Chriſt to have ſuffered theſe things, and to enter into his glory[b]?"

The awful ſcheme of Prophecy, if it be

[a] John iv. 26.

[b] Luke xxiv. 25, 26.

con-

conſidered in a general view, not only refers to the coming of Chriſt in the fleſh, and to the introduction and final eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, but includes alſo in its comprehenſive range the fortunes of almoſt all the kingdoms of the antient world; it is not the riſe, or the overthrow, of opulent ſtates and mighty empires alone, of Tyre, of Egypt, or of Babylon, which the Holy Spirit predicts; but with equal preciſion, and equal certainty, it marks the time, and the manner, in which the inferior kingdoms of Moab, and Edom, of Ammon, and of Amalek, are gradually to yield to the increaſing power of their neighbours; and it does ſo, becauſe all the kingdoms of the ancient world, as they roſe ſucceſſively to power, were implicated in ſome way or other in the fates and fortunes of the people of Iſrael, either as the miniſters of Almighty vengeance, to puniſh that people for diſobedience and rebellion, or as the agents of his mercy, to reſcue them from baniſhment, and to reinſtate them in the poſſeſſions of their inheritance.

It ſeems therefore to have been the deſign of God, when he poured forth his Holy Spirit upon the Prophets of Iſrael, in the firſt inſtance, to give ſupport and encouragement to his choſen people; to teach them, that even when they thought themſelves moſt neglected, forſaken, and deſolate, they were ſtill under the guidance of his paternal arm; that his anger would in time give place to mercy; and that then the cup of his vengeance would be poured out, with full meaſure, upon the heads of their oppreſſors. But theſe gracious aſſurances had alſo the higher view of inſpiring them with confidence in the power and the promiſe of their God; that when they ſaw the temporal prediction literally verified, and the temporal promiſe actually fulfilled, they might anticipate, without any fear of deception or diſappointment, the approach of that great Deliverer, who was to bring with him bleſſings and ſalvation "to the whole race of mankind."

The true end of all Prophecy, therefore, was to announce the Redeemer of mankind; and whatever intermediate purpoſes were

were to be anſwered; whatever light the omniſcience of God thought fit to throw upon the future fortunes, either of the Jews, or any other nation, it was done with a view ultimately to bear witneſs to the character, office, and ſufferings of the bleſſed Jeſus; and to deſcribe the nature of that Religion, which he came into the world to eſtabliſh.

"To him," ſaid St. Peter, "give *All* the Prophets witneſs [c]." And upon another occaſion, the ſame Apoſtle tells the Jews, "that Chriſt hath fulfilled the things, which God hath ſhewed by the mouth of *All* his Prophets [d]." And again, after arguing from the authority of Moſes, he adds, "yea, and all the Prophets from Samuel, and thoſe that follow after, as many as have ſpoken, have likewiſe foretold of theſe days [e]." So alſo, our bleſſed Lord himſelf, when he wiſhed to convince his doubting and incredulous diſciples, explained to them his own hiſtory, "beginning at Moſes," as the hiſtorian informs us, "and *All* the Prophets [f]."

[c] Acts x. 43.
[d] Acts iii. 18.
[e] Acts iii. 24.
[f] Luke xxiv. 27.

From

From theſe paſſages of Holy Writ it may be inferred, that the Prophecies of the Old Teſtament are not to be conſidered ſeparately, as ſo many detached and diſtinct revelations of God's deſigns; but as forming a complete and connected ſyſtem, tending to one and the ſame important end, and that they are only to be underſtood by conſidering them in a regular ſeries, with a view to that end.

That any one accompliſhed Prophecy is a demonſtration of the interpoſition of God, cannot be diſputed; becauſe in any inſtance to reveal the ſecrets of futurity, is beyond the reach of human powers. But allowing this to be true, it muſt be granted alſo, that the proof of Divine agency will have a ſtronger effect upon the mind, in proportion to the variety of circumſtances predicted; to the diſtance of time between the Prophecy and its accompliſhment; to the ſtrangeneſs and improbability of the facts revealed, and to the minute delineation of particulars; and of courſe it will follow, that the mind cannot poſſibly receive ſuch conviction from any ſingle Prophecy applied to Chriſt, as from a connected

nected view and compariſon of the whole together.

Such a compariſon as this, or rather the outline of ſuch a compariſon, it is my intention to trace on the preſent occaſion; more than the outline it will be impoſſible for me to give; and the nature of my ſubject only calls upon me to ſhew, that Chriſtianity was foretold by a regular ſucceſſion of Prophecies, commencing from the fall of our firſt parents; and that theſe Prophecies, neceſſarily obſcure, at the time of their delivery, from the ambiguity of figurative phraſeology, the extraordinary circumſtances foretold, and the defects of a partial revelation, were ſtill clear enough to keep alive the conſtant hope of the promiſed Deliverer, and preciſe enough, when he came at length in the fulneſs of time, to prove, that he really was the perſon promiſed and expected.

For this purpoſe it will be ſufficient to ſelect from the infinite variety of Prophetical deſcriptions to be found in the Old Teſtament, a few of the moſt ſtriking, and the

the moſt appropriate; ſuch as the moſt zealous adherents to the Moſaic Law have allowed to be deſcriptions of their expected Meſſiah, and ſuch as the advocates of Chriſtianity have proved, beyond all controverſy, to relate excluſively to the Author and Finiſher of their faith.

The ſcheme of Prophecy commences with the fall of man; in compaſſion to the afflicted ſinners, God vouchſafes to tell them, "that he would put enmity between the ſerpent and the woman, and between his ſeed and her ſeed, and that the ſeed of the woman ſhould bruiſe the ſerpent's head[g]." Taken ſingly, and without any connexion with the ſubſequent Prophecies, it would be difficult perhaps to aſſign a reaſon, why this declaration ſhould be applied to Chriſt: but every Revelation that follows it is an additional aſſurance to us, that this is indeed the baſis of them all, the firſt poſitive aſſurance of future Redemption.

The Jewiſh Church always conſidered it to be ſo; and, in later times, the Prophet

[g] Gen. iii. 15.

Iſaiah

Iſaiah alludes to it, as a known and eſtabliſhed point, when he is deſcribing the glories of Chriſt's kingdom, and the happineſs which awaits the ſeed of the bleſſed of the Lord; for "then," ſays he, "duſt ſhall be the ſerpent's meat[h]."

Chriſtians at all times have agreed in conſidering this declaration of the Almighty to be the earlieſt dawn of that hope, which is now become a ſure and certain confidence; "a light," as the Apoſtle ſays, "ſhining in a dark place, which gradually became more viſible, till it opened into perfect day[i]."

After this original promiſe of Redemption, made by God himſelf, the Antediluvian world were not favoured with any farther intimation of the will of God: idolatry and irreligion were permitted to take their courſe, till the meaſure of iniquity was full: nor does it appear, that the father of the reſtored world, the juſt and righteous Noah, although gifted occaſionally with ſome portion of the Holy Spirit,

[h] Iſai. lxv. 25. [i] 2 Pet. i. 19.

for

for the good of his contemporaries, was empowered to make to them any more explicit declaration of the merciful intentions of Providence. The covenant which God made with him, although it is ſtyled a perpetual covenant, "the covenant of the age, or the everlaſting covenant [k];" αἰώνος διαθηκη, as the Seventy have tranſlated it; from the time at which it was made, and the ſign or token which accompanied it, appears to have been a temporal covenant merely; a promiſe, that the earth ſhould not be deſtroyed again in the ſame way: and afterwards, when he predicts the fortunes of his ſons, the benediction of Shem, whether with our common verſions we read, "Bleſſed be the Lord God of Shem [l]," or with a great oriental critic, "Bleſſed of Jehovah, my God, be Shem [m];" this benediction cannot, I think, be underſtood to mean more than that the poſterity of Shem would be, as we know they actually were, a peculiar people, under the immediate protection and government of God.

[k] Gen. ix. 16. [l] Gen. ix. 26.

[m] Kennicott's Diſſertation on the Hebrew Text, p. 561.

We

We may go on then to the call of Abraham: at that time we learn that the extraordinary perſon, who was firſt ſpoken of generally as "the ſeed of the woman" (was deſigned, that is, to be born in the fleſh, and to come in the form and ſubſtance of a man), was to be a deſcendant of the Holy Patriarch; "in thee," ſays the Almighty, "ſhall all families of the earth be bleſſed [n]." Iſmael, the firſt born, is afterwards excluded from the envied inheritance; he is promiſed the enjoyment of temporal proſperity indeed, that his dominions ſhall be fertile, that he ſhall be the head of a princely line, and the founder of a great and mighty nation [o]; but the covenant of grace meanwhile is eſtabliſhed with Iſaac, and in the ſame manner it was afterwards taken from Eſau, and limited to the poſterity of Jacob [p].

To the Patriarch [q] Jacob it is repeated upon ſeveral occaſions, and in various ways; by dreams and nightly viſions, and by the perſonal appearance even of the Holy One,

[n] Gen. xii. 3.
[o] Gen. xvii. 20.
[p] Gen. xxvii. 29.
[q] Gen. xxviii. 13.

that

that the bleſſing of Abraham was conferred upon him; and he in his laſt moments transfers it, in a remarkable Prophecy, to his ſon Judah.

"Judah," ſays the Patriarch, when he is announcing to his aſſembled ſons the fortunes which are to befal them in the laſt days, "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren ſhall praiſe; thy hand ſhall be in the neck of thine enemies, thy father's children ſhall bow down before thee;" "the Sceptre ſhall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him ſhall the gathering of the people be [r].

I am aware that no ſingle Prophecy of the Old Teſtament has received ſo great a variety of interpretations, as this remarkable Prophecy of Jacob: but they are critical interpretations of words: the general meaning and intent of the Prophecy has been admitted on all hands; and whether the word Shiloh be tranſlated, as it is in the Latin Vulgate, *Qui mittendus eſt*, he who

[r] Gen. xlix. 8—10.

is

is to be ſent; whether we read with ſome copies of the Septuagint verſion, τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῷ, the things reſerved for him, or with other copies, ᾧ ἀποκεῖται, he for whom it is reſerved; it cannot be diſputed, but that the perſon ſo alluded to is "the ſeed of the woman," the Meſſiah of the Jews, the Saviour and Redeemer of mankind.

And if we attend to the time at which the Prophecy was delivered, and the language in which it is conveyed; if we conſider, that the deſcendants of Abraham were now recently ſettled in the land of Goſhen; that they were to continue there in ſlavery for four generations; and that God thus promiſed them a perpetuity of temporal dominion—a continuance of it at leaſt, until the appearance of their great Deliverer; we may conclude, that it was mercifully given to ſupport them under the hardſhips which they were to endure, and to convince them, that the covenant made with their anceſtors would be religiouſly performed.

The promiſe thus limited to the tribe of

Judah reſted there for ſeveral centuries: during the whole of the captivity in Egypt, no farther intimations are given of future redemption. But when the Jews had eſcaped from their long ſervitude, and, after all their trials and ſufferings, were entering, under the guidance of their Legiſlator, upon the promiſed land, the Holy Spirit compels a Heathen Soothſayer to confirm and ratify the original covenant in the face of their enemies: "Bleſſed," ſays Balaam, in the very words which Jacob had uſed before him, "Bleſſed is he that bleſſeth thee, and curſed is he that curſeth thee [h];" and then, in defiance of the reſentment of Balak, he breaks forth into a rapturous anticipation of the triumphs of the Meſſiah: "I ſhall ſee him, but not now; I ſhall behold him, but not nigh: there ſhall come a ſtar out of Jacob, and a ſceptre ſhall riſe out of Iſrael; out of Jacob ſhall come he that ſhall have dominion, and ſhall deſtroy him that remaineth of the city [i]."

That the Holy Spirit, when theſe expreſſions were uſed, might deſign in the

[h] Numb. xxiv. 9.

[i] Numb. xxiv. 17—19.

firſt

firſt inſtance to allude to David, and his conqueſts of the Moabites and the Edomites, I do not deny: but the expreſſions evidently prove, that the Prophecy had a farther view to the glories and the univerſal dominion of the Meſſiah.

It was now a very important criſis in the hiſtory of the Jews: they were upon the point of entering that country which God had promiſed to their anceſtors; and at this critical period, Moſes their leader, he who had conducted them out of Egypt, who had ſupported them in all their difficulties, had interceded with their God for them, and given them a civil polity, and a religion—this divine Legiſlator was upon the eve of quitting them for ever. Before his departure, he comforts them with the promiſe of another Prophet, like unto himſelf: "The Lord thy God will raiſe up unto thee a Prophet, from the midſt of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ſhall ye hearken [k]." If it be queſtioned, whether this be a Prophecy of Chriſt or not, we may appeal not only to

[k] Deut. xviii. 15.

the ſimilitude between the bleſſed Jeſus and the Jewiſh Legiſlator, or the degree of inſpiration, or their perſonal converſation with the moſt High God, but to the undoubted authority of an inſpired Apoſtle. St. Peter does ſo apply it in his firſt harangue to the Jews; "For Moſes truly ſaid," he argues, "unto the fathers, A Prophet ſhall the Lord God raiſe up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him ſhall ye hear in all things, whatſoever he ſhall ſay unto you[x]."

Thus it was that the Jews were taught to expect in their Meſſiah the gifts and endowments of a Prophet; and the holy Evangeliſt informs us, that the multitude, when they were miraculouſly fed by Jeſus, cried out immediately, "This is of a truth that Prophet that ſhould come into the world[y]."

In the interval between the death of Moſes and the eſtabliſhment of David upon the throne of Iſrael, the Prophetic oracles are ſilent: during that period, the

[x] Acts iii. 22.

[y] John vi. 14.

choſen

choſen people were gradually extending their conqueſts, and acquiring a ſecure and permanent eſtabliſhment in the land of Canaan. Then God was ever preſent with them, in every event of their lives; both their welfare as a community, and their happineſs as individuals, were under the immediate guidance of his particular Providence. They wanted not therefore the warning voice of the Prophet, to point out to them impending dangers, or to ſuſtain and conſole them under their actual preſſure: the promiſe of Abraham, as it was now called; the covenant made by the Almighty with their righteous progenitors, in their own perſons they had ſeen fulfilled, in one ſenſe, by the acquiſition of the conquered provinces of the Canaanites. With juſt confidence, therefore, they might anticipate its full and final accompliſhment. But it ſtill continued to be the general inheritance of Judah, till the eſtabliſhment of David upon the throne, and then it was limited to the houſe and family of that prince.

"Go," ſays the Holy Spirit to the Pro-

phet Nathan, "Go, and tell my ſervant David, Thus ſaith the Lord—When thy days be fulfilled, and thou ſhalt ſleep with thy fathers, I will ſet up thy ſeed after thee, which ſhall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will eſtabliſh his kingdom. He ſhall build an houſe for my name, and I will ſtabliſh the throne of his kingdom for ever; and thine houſe and thy kingdom ſhall be eſtabliſhed for ever before thee; thy throne ſhall be eſtabliſhed for ever [z]."

If it be ſaid, that this is a prophetical deſcription of Solomon, and not of Chriſt, we may aſk, whether it is true of Solomon to ſay, that he ſhould be raiſed to the throne, when David ſlept with his fathers, that his kingdom ſhould be perpetual, and his throne eſtabliſhed for ever? It may alſo be aſked, whether the Holy Spirit does not allude to this very Prophecy, as relating to Chriſt, when the Angel announces to the bleſſed Virgin, avowedly ſpeaking of Chriſt, that the Lord ſhould give unto him the throne of his Father David, "that he ſhould reign over the houſe of Jacob for ever; and of

[z] 2 Sam. vii. 5—16.

his

his kingdom there ſhould be no end[a]?" As the temporal ſplendour of the Jewiſh nation was at its height during the reigns of David and Solomon, ſo alſo their Religion was at that time more free than ever from Pagan ſuperſtitions, and their attachment to the God of their fathers more ſteady and more inviolable.

But from that period, idolatrous worſhip began to gain ground amongſt them; a ſucceſſion of vicious princes corrupted the public ritual, and debaſed the Religion of their people. Then it was, that the Almighty thought fit to impart more liberally the gifts of his Holy Spirit, and to reveal with greater particularity, for the ſupport, it may well be ſuppoſed, and the comfort of the righteous, who adhered to the only true God, the character and the office of him, which was to accompliſh the original promiſe.

Whilſt ſome of the inſpired Prophets are commanded to cenſure the prevailing vices, and the crimes of the people; to paint in

[a] Luke i. 33.

ſtrong colours the odious ſin of Idolatry, and to call them back, if poſſible, to the worſhip of the true God; others are employed to deſcribe, in glowing imagery, and appropriate language, the future advent of the Meſſiah, the glories of his kingdom, and the brilliant rewards which are reſerved for the righteous. The Prophet Iſaiah, being ſent to announce to Ahaz the aſſurances of deliverance from his confederate enemies, gives him at the ſame time the aſſurance of an higher and more important deliverance, to be granted in later times. The houſe of David, he tells him, ſhall never fail, till that great deliverance takes place: and this is to happen, when "a Virgin ſhall conceive and bring forth a ſon, whoſe name ſhall be called Immanuel [b]." "There ſhall come forth a Rod," ſays the ſame Prophet, "out of the ſtem of Jeſſe, and a Branch ſhall grow out of his roots: the Spirit of the Lord ſhall reſt upon him—with righteouſneſs ſhall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth—righteouſneſs ſhall be the gir-

[b] Iſai. vii. 14.

dle

dle of his loins, and faithfulneſs the girdle of his reins [c]."

Other ſimilar predictions of the ſame Prophet I paſs over purpoſely: my wiſh is to trace the ſeries of Prophetical Revelation from the beginning, not to detail all that the Prophets have ſpoken; otherwiſe it would be eaſy from the volume of the Evangelical Prophet, whoſe predictions are, in truth, a hiſtory of the Goſpel—it would be eaſy to perceive, that Chriſt was to confirm the authority of his miſſion, and to prove his Divinity by a diſplay of benevolent miracles; that he was to be rejected by the Jews to whom he was ſent, and received by the Gentiles, although deſcended from the royal houſe of David; that his immediate Parents were to be in a ſtate of humiliation and indigence; that he "was to be a man of ſorrows, and acquainted with grief;" to be wounded for our tranſgreſſions, and to ſuffer for our iniquities [d]; and yet, that "his name ſhould be called Wonderful, Counſellor, the mighty God, the everlaſting Father, the Prince of peace [e]."

[c] Iſai. xi. 1. [d] Iſai. liii. 3. [e] Iſai. ix. 6.

It

It would be eaſy to cite the paſſages themſelves, in which thoſe extraordinary, and to all appearance contradictory, circumſtances are foretold: but I haſten to other Prophecies. About the ſame period of the Jewiſh hiſtory, the Prophet Micah marks the place in which the Meſſiah was to be born. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah," ſays he, "though thou be little among the thouſands of Judah, yet out of thee ſhall he come forth unto me, that is to be Ruler in Iſrael; whoſe goings forth have been from of old, from everlaſting[f]."

As we proceed in the hiſtory of the Jewiſh people, we find, that when the vengeance of the Almighty had overtaken them; when their city and their temple were deſtroyed, and their tribes led away into captivity, ſtronger and fuller aſſurances were continually given them of future deliverance.

In the days of affliction and public calamity, the unbeliever was always ready to deride the expectations of the faithful, and to accuſe the Almighty of tardineſs

[f] Micah v. 2.

in

in the execution of his promiſes: "Let him make ſpeed, and haſten his work," they ſaid, "that we may ſee it; and let the counſel of the Holy One of Iſrael draw nigh and come, that we may know[g]." God therefore vouchſafes to afford to his righteous ſervants, that they might refute the cavils of the gainſayers, a clearer and more explicit aſſurance, that his promiſe was never forgotten.

"Behold, the days come, ſaith the Lord," by the mouth of his Prophet Jeremiah, "that I will perform that good thing which I have promiſed unto the houſe of Iſrael, and to the houſe of Judah; in thoſe days, and at that time, will I cauſe the Branch of Righteouſneſs to grow up unto David; and he ſhall execute judgment and righteouſneſs in the land: in thoſe days ſhall Judah be ſaved, and Jeruſalem ſhall dwell ſafely; and this is the name wherewith he ſhall be called, the Lord our Righteouſneſs[h]." And when thoſe days come, the Holy Spirit by the ſame Prophet declares, that the Moſaic Law ſhall give place to the

[g] Iſai. v. 19.

[h] Jerem. xxxiii. 14.

new

new covenant. "After thoſe days," ſaith the Lord, "I will put my Law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God, and they ſhall be my people[i]."

The Prophet Ezekiel, who was himſelf a captive in Chaldea, declares, that "the ſcattered flock ſhall at length be gathered into their fold; and I will ſet up one ſhepherd over them, and he ſhall feed them, even my ſervant David; he ſhall feed them, and he ſhall be their ſhepherd, and I the Lord will be their God, and I will make with them a covenant of peace[k]."

To the holy Daniel, when he is praying to the Almighty to take pity upon his people, and to redeem them from their captivity, the angel Gabriel announces the preciſe time of the Meſſiah's appearance upon earth. "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and thy holy city, to puniſh their tranſgreſſion, and to make an end of ſins; to bring in everlaſting righteouſneſs, and to ſeal up the viſion, and the Pro-

[i] Jerem. xxxi. 33.

[k] Ezek. xxxiv. 23.

phecy,

phecy, and to anoint the moſt Holy." "Know therefore and underſtand," ſays the angel, "that from the going forth of the commandment to reſtore and to build Jeruſalem unto the Meſſiah, the prince, ſhall be ſeven weeks; and after threeſcore and two weeks ſhall Meſſiah be cut off, but not for himſelf[1]."

I forbear all comment upon this ſtriking prediction; it is impoſſible for language to be more preciſe; and it has been the ſtudy of pious and learned men, to ſhew how exactly it was verified by the event.

We are now come to the laſt period in the hiſtory of Prophecy: the Jews were to return from their captivity, and to rebuild their Temple; but it was to be far inferior to the former in external ſplendour, in decorations, and all the viſible tokens of the immediate preſence of their tutelary God.

The Holy Spirit, at this time, while it

[1] Dan. ix. 25.

ſignifies

ſignifies the approach of their Deliverer, uſes that method of conſoling the people for the evident diminution of the ſplendour of their Temple. "Behold," ſays the Prophet Zechariah, "the man whoſe name is the Branch; and he ſhall grow up out of his place, and he ſhall build the temple of the Lord: even he ſhall build the temple of the Lord; and he ſhall bear the glory, and ſhall ſit and rule upon his throne, and he ſhall be a prieſt upon his throne [m]."

When the elders of Iſrael are looking back with regret and ſorrow to what they had loſt, the Holy Spirit forbids them to deſpair: God, by his Prophet Haggai, reminds them of the covenant he had made with their fathers, and of his fixed and inviolable purpoſe; and aſſures them, that he will make the latter houſe more glorious than the former. "Yet once it is a little while, and I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come; and I will fill his houſe with glory—the glory of this latter houſe ſhall be greater than of the former, ſaith the Lord of

[m] Zechar. vi. 12.

Hoſts;

Hoſts; and in this place will I give peace[n]."

Malachi, the laſt of the illuſtrious line, aſſures them, at the ſame time, that to this their new Temple the Meſſiah would come. "Behold," ſays he, "I will ſend my meſſenger, and he ſhall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye ſeek, ſhall ſuddenly come to his temple, even the meſſenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he ſhall come, ſaith the Lord of Hoſts[o]."

With this expreſs and poſitive aſſurance the viſion was ſealed up, and the book of Prophecy cloſed: for a period of more than two centuries, God left his people to reflect upon the revelations which he had already given them, to meditate continually upon the holy Oracles which were committed to their cuſtody, and to cheriſh in their minds the anxious expectation of that glorious Perſon who was to come.

Thus I have traced, from the fall of

[n] Hagg. ii. 6.

[o] Mal. iii. 1.

man,

man, a regular ſucceſſion of Prophecies, delivered at diſtant intervals of time, and under very different circumſtances of temporal fortune and proſperity; but all combining to ſhew, that at a certain time an extraordinary perſon would appear among the Jews, and all agreeing that that perſon would be of the tribe of Judah, and of the royal lineage of David; that he would be a Prophet, a King, and a Prieſt; that he would come as a meſſenger from God, and would proclaim a new covenant, a covenant of peace, not only to the Jews, but to the whole race of mankind.

Of the Prophecies which I have ſelected, almoſt all relate excluſively, and in their primary ſenſe, to Chriſt; and for that reaſon I have confined myſelf to them; not that the evidence of other Prophecies, of thoſe which relate in their primary ſenſe to David, or Solomon, or any other illuſtrious Iſraelite, and in their ſecondary only to Chriſt, is not as clear, as concluſive, and as ſatisfactory; for ſo it certainly is: when the holy Pſalmiſt ſays, "Thou ſhalt not leave my ſoul in hell, neither ſhalt thou

thou ſuffer thine holy one to ſee corruption[p]," he is clearly ſpeaking, not of himſelf, but of Chriſt; becauſe, as the Apoſtle St. Peter argues, "David died, and was buried with his fathers, and ſaw corruption; Chriſt did not[q]; and ſo in every caſe, where a Prophecy is ſuppoſed to have a double ſenſe, if there be any one circumſtance which cannot poſſibly apply to the perſon humanly ſpoken of, we are to conclude, that beyond its immediate application it has a reference ultimately to Chriſt. The force of the Prophecy therefore is equally ſtrong: but ſtill, where there is any thing of ambiguity, or any thing like myſtical alluſion, the prediction is more expoſed to cavil, and miſconception, and miſinterpretation; while the force of the direct Prophecies, neither the artifices of the Jewiſh Interpreter, nor the ſneers and ridicule of the Infidel, have ever been able to weaken, or to elude.

Of the uſe of Prophecy in general, and of the nature of the argument with which it ſupplies the Chriſtian, it is not to be expected that I ſhould ſay much; it is

[p] Pſalm xvi. 10. [q] Acts ii. 27. xiii. 35.

enough for my purpoſe to have ſhewn, that the Holy Spirit gradually announced with more and more perſpicuity, as the fulneſs of time drew near, the advent of the Mediator, who was to effect the great purpoſe of man's redemption. Every thing beſide is foreign from my ſubject. But as in our days the frivolous cavils and the petulant declamations of forgotten ſceptics are continually received by the Sophiſts of the modern ſchools of infidelity, it would be wrong perhaps to paſs over in total ſilence, a topic ſo nearly connected with the argument before us.

It was ſaid by Porphyry, and by Celſus, in the earlieſt days of Chriſtianity; it has been ſaid by the Deiſts of our times; and it is one of the favourite aſſertions of all unbelievers, that Prophecy may be a good evidence to a Jew, or to one who believes the Divinity of the Moſaic Law, and really thinks, that the Prophetical books were dictated by God; but that it is beneath the notice of minds that are enlightened by philoſophy, and which ſoar above the bigotry of vulgar prejudices.

What

What then if it can be proved that an event, of which at the time there was no appearance or probability whatever, was literally predicted for ages before it took place, and that it did take place at the very time and in the very manner foretold; if this can be proved, is it not to all men equally, to the Gentile as well as to the Jew, an inconteſtible evidence of the interpoſition of God?

If, for example, the Holy Spirit declared of Iſhmael, that "he ſhould be a wild man; that his hand ſhould be againſt every man, and every man's hand againſt him; and that his ſeed ſhould not be numbered for multitude[r];" and we find, that this deſcription is verified at this day in the numbers, the wandering life, and the unconquerable ſpirit of his deſcendants in Arabia: if it was ſaid of Canaan, that he ſhould be "a ſervant of ſervants unto his brethren[s]," and we ſee his wretched poſterity ſtill groaning under the yoke of the crueleſt and moſt oppreſſive ſervitude: if Tyre, Nineveh, Babylon, and Jeruſalem,

[r] Gen. xvi. 10—12.

[s] Gen. ix. 25.

were all deſtroyed preciſely as the Prophet has declared that they ſhould be, are not all theſe facts plain and forcible appeals to the underſtanding of every human being, who is capable of thinking or reaſoning at all?

But the obſcurity of Prophecies, it is ſaid, gives ſuch a latitude of interpretation, that no certain dependance is to be placed upon them. That Prophecies are obſcure cannot be denied; they muſt all be more or leſs ſo, from the very nature of the caſe: for as it was not poſſible to reveal plainly and explicitly, during the exiſtence of a preparatory diſpenſation, the great truths reſerved for the latter days, it was neceſſary to throw over them the myſterious veil of Prophetical phraſeology. But if the Prophecy be a literal one, a compariſon with the event will remove the obſcurity, and preciſely fix its meaning; if it be figurative, the difficulty ariſing from figurative and ſymbolical expreſſions cannot be done away even by the event; for, as the great author of the diſcourſe on the Uſe of Prophecy has obſerved, a figurative deſcription

of

of a future event will be figurative ſtill, and will have all the obſcurity of a figurative deſcription as well after, as before, the event[t].

But to bring the whole queſtion to an iſſue: there are in fact but two points to be conſidered; and no honeſt and impartial mind, that has ſatisfied itſelf upon thoſe two points, can fail to look with a firm and unſhaken faith, till it ſhall pleaſe the Almighty to make known to us, what even now continues to be ſhrouded from our view; for, "as yet the viſion is for an appointed time[u]."

In the firſt place, is it poſſible, that the Prophecies, which ſo clearly and pointedly announce a Redeemer to come, ſhould be forgeries? That they undoubtedly could not be ſo, muſt be evident to every one, who recollects, that the ſacred depoſit of Prophecy was committed to the care of a whole nation; that the ſeveral predictions of thoſe inſpired perſons, whoſe cha-

[t] See Sherlock's Diſcourſe on the Uſe of Prophecy.
[u] Habbak. ii. 3.

racter and office the people were taught to admire and to venerate, were enrolled in the public and authentic acts of their nation; that they were recited daily in their ſynagogues; were guarded with the moſt ſcrupulous and jealous care; and cheriſhed as the foundation of all their hopes, and their claims to future glory and dominion.

If under ſuch circumſtances it be impoſſible for an inſtant to entertain the ſuſpicion of a forgery, or to queſtion the authenticity of the Prophetical deſcriptions of our bleſſed Lord; the next point to be aſcertained is, whether the perſon ſo deſcribed did actually appear in the world: did he come at the time previouſly ſpecified? Was he really the deſcendant of David? And did he claim to be the meſſenger of God, and the founder of a new covenant? "Did he raiſe and ſupport the poor and lowly in ſpirit?" Was he "eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame?" And did the bleſſing of them that were ready to periſh come upon him? Did he, laſtly, aſſert, that he was come to redeem mankind? Did he

"die

"die for our ſins, and riſe again for our juſtification?" If all this be true, if it be an undoubted hiſtorical fact, that a perſon, with ſuch claims, and ſuch pretenſions, did actually appear in Judea, the concluſion is immediate: we have only to acknowledge, as Philip did to Nathaniel, that "we have found him of whom Moſes in the Law, and all the Prophets, did write, Jeſus of Nazareth, the ſon of Joſeph [x]."

[x] John i. 45.

SERMON VI.

JEREMIAH xlvi. 28.

FEAR THOU NOT, O JACOB MY SERVANT, SAITH THE LORD: FOR I AM WITH THEE; FOR I WILL MAKE A FULL END OF ALL THE NATIONS WHITHER I HAVE DRIVEN THEE: BUT I WILL NOT MAKE A FULL END OF THEE.

HAVING ſhewn in my former Lectures what were the great uſes of the preparatory diſpenſations of Judaiſm, it is now time for me to conſider the admirable methods of God's providence, by which it was contrived, that the fortunes of the Jewiſh people, their political revolutions,

tions, and their alternate changes from power and proſperity to humiliation and ſlavery, ſhould all contribute to promote the great purpoſe of preſerving in the world the knowledge of the true God, and of preparing the way for the promiſed Meſſiah.

It is reaſonable to expect, that a nation ſet apart and diſtinguiſhed from all others, in the eſſential features of laws, cuſtoms, and religion, ſhould alſo be diſtinguiſhed by ſome ſtriking peculiarity in their external circumſtances, that the viciſſitudes of their fortunes would be more uncommon, and that their happineſs and their miſery would carry with them ſome indications of the deſign, for which they were originally ſeparated from the reſt of mankind.

In the declaration, by which the Prophet is ordered to conſole the companions of his captivity, a difference is marked between the conduct of the Almighty to his choſen people, and to the reſt of mankind: "Fear not, O Jacob," ſaith the Lord; "other nations I will utterly deſtroy—

thine

thine enemies, thoſe who have been the miniſters of my vengeance to puniſh thee, ſhall be ſwept away from the face of the earth: but of thee I will not make a full end."

This then is the peculiarity by which the Jews, as a nation, were ſtrongly contraſted, in their external circumſtances, with every other nation exiſting; that they were not at all affected by thoſe circumſtances of alliance, of commerce, of migration, or of conqueſt, which either inſenſibly change the manners and habits of a people, or force them reluctantly into new aſſociations, till every trace of their original character be loſt: that although unfortunate as no people ever were (for they ſtrictly verified what their Legiſlator had foretold, "that no miſery ſhould be like their miſery"), they tenaciouſly preſerved the remembrance of the promiſe of Abraham: although ſcattered and diſperſed over the face of the globe, their national character was as diſtinct as if they had never quitted the confines of the promiſed land: and although reduced by the ravages of inceſſant wars,

and

and the ſevere hardſhips of ſervitude, their population continually increaſed; and the remnant, to whoſe ſorrow and contrition God once more granted the poſſeſſions of their forefathers, became again in no long time a flouriſhing and powerful people.

Thus it was contrived by the wiſdom of God, for the inſtruction and benefit of all his creatures, that the whole tenor of the Jewiſh hiſtory ſhould contain a conſtant diſplay of his particular providence; and as it hath pleaſed him, that the events of that hiſtory ſhould be recorded for our uſe, under the immediate guidance of his Holy Spirit, we are to profit from the leſſons it conveys, as much as thoſe who were ſpectators of the fact recorded: nor are we left to the fallible and uncertain concluſions of our own reaſon; for this hiſtory (it is the obſervation of a great man, and I will give it in his own expreſſive language) hath herein a ſingular prerogative above all that have been written by the moſt ſufficient of merely human authors—it ſetteth down expreſsly the true and firſt cauſes of all that happened, not imputing " the death

of

of Ahab to his over forwardneſs in battle," the "ruin of his family to the ſecurity of Jehoram in Jezreel;" nor the "victories of Hazael to the great commotions raiſed in Iſrael, by the coming of Jehu; but referring all unto the will of God, I mean, unto his revealed will [a]."

It is not that the fates and fortunes of the reſt of mankind were not as much under the control and direction of God's providence, as thoſe of the people of Iſrael: but the interpoſition of that providence was not ſo viſible, nor ſo evident to man.—In the annals of prophane hiſtory, we paſs to the firſt great Origin of all, through the medium of ſecondary cauſes; and too often, it is to be feared, the mind ſtops there, and is content to attribute the effect produced to the immediate cauſe before us; to the operation of the paſſions, or the appetites, or the underſtanding of man, without raiſing its thoughts to him who uſes the agency of human affections, and human appetites, to bring to paſs the purpoſes of his

[a] Ralegh's Hiſtory of the World, Book II. Part I. chap. xxi.

own eternal will. But when we open the ſacred Volume of inſpiration, the caſe is widely different; the tranſition from the effect to the firſt cauſe is immediate; the will of God is announced, and the event follows that will, without any delay, or any chain of intermediate operations—ſucceſs and misfortune, defeat and victory—regularly follow the performance or the violation of the original compact made between God and his people. Thus we are brought, as it were, into the very counſels of the Almighty; and the revealed will of God being our guide, we can be at no loſs to combine the principal events, to bring them together under one view, and to trace them ultimately to that one great deſign, which connects and harmonizes the whole.

God, when he firſt ſummoned the father of the Jewiſh people from his native country, expreſsly told him, that his deſcendants ſhould become a numerous people, numerous as "the ſand of the ſea, or the duſt of the earth [b]." The holy Jacob is told, "that he ſhould ſpread to the Eaſt and the Weſt,

[b] Gen. xii. 2. xiii. 16.

the

the North and the South[c]." But when the Patriarchal family went down to Egypt with their flocks, what reaſon had they to expect the accompliſhment of this promiſe? They were few in number, and poor and inefficient in their circumſtances. In the common courſe of things, even if they had been favoured and cheriſhed throughout by the Princes of Egypt, as they were at firſt; if their lives had been tranquil and eaſy, and their reſources affluent, ages and generations muſt have paſſed away, before they could have been numerous enough to juſtify in any degree the expectations, which the promiſe made to their anceſtors had raiſed. But we know that their lives were neither eaſy nor undiſturbed; a ſpirit of jealouſy, which the rapidity of their increaſe ſeems firſt to have excited, induced the Egyptians to harraſs and oppreſs theſe new ſettlers, in whom they expected to find a rival, and an enemy, and perhaps a conqueror. Laborious taſks were impoſed upon them, under which it was conceived their ſtrength muſt fail; the rigour of their ſervitude was increaſed, and every ſcheme,

[c] Gen. xxviii. 14.

that

that the bittereſt malice could deviſe, was executed, in order to check and depreſs them; but in vain: for, as their own hiſtorian informs us, "the more they were afflicted the more they multiplied and grew[d]." And when the days of their bondage were accompliſhed, they came forth, in defiance of all the attempts to detain them in ſlavery, or to reduce them to inſignificance, a numerous and wealthy people.

It was this miraculous increaſe, under circumſtances ſo inauſpicious, that they were afterwards commanded by their Legiſlator to commemorate, when they offered up to God the firſt-fruits of their harveſt. The form of thankſgiving, which the Law preſcribed upon that ſolemn occaſion, commences with a compariſon between their firſt entry into Egypt, when they were going to ſelect food for their ſupport, and their triumphal departure from it, with the mighty ſign and wonder accompanying their progreſs: the Angel of God continually watching over them, and the Almighty arm uplifted, to check and diſcom-

[d] Exod. i. 12.

fit

fit the hoſt of their purſuers: "thou ſhalt ſpeak and ſay," ſaid the Law, "before the Lord thy God, A Syrian ready to periſh was my father; and he went down into Egypt and ſojourned there with a few, and became there a nation great, mighty, and populous[e]."

This was the firſt ſtep in the gradual accompliſhment of the temporal covenant: redeemed from oppreſſion and from ſlavery, enriched with the treaſures of their enemies, and evidently protected and guarded by God, the people of Iſrael now anticipated with confidence the poſſeſſion of that good land which had been promiſed to their fathers: but they were not aware of the trials and the difficulties which ſtill awaited them; that they were to wander for forty years, without any fixed or regular ſettlement, in the pathleſs deſert before them; and that the land of plenty was only to be acquired by the conqueſt of the warlike nations who then poſſeſſed it. On the events which befel them in the wilderneſs it would be idle to

[e] Deut. xxvi. 5.

dwell; it is known to every one, that as the courſe, which they took, deviated in many inſtances from that which human prudence, or human foreſight, would have choſen; ſo the mode of their ſubſiſtence, their dreſs, and their diet, during their tedious marches, were all miracles, and only to be accounted for by the conſtant interference of God. So their own great leader told them; "I have led you forty years," ſaid he, "in the wilderneſs: your cloaths are not waxen old upon you, and thy ſhoe is not waxen old upon thy foot: ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or ſtrong drink, that ye might know, that I am the Lord your God[f]." The great object then of this ſojourning in the deſert, and this continual diſplay of miracles, was to impreſs upon their minds a thorough conviction of the power of God, and an implicit faith in his promiſes. Let us ſuppoſe then, that all theſe trials are paſt, that they are now a diſtinct nation, with a code of judicial ordinances, a ſyſtem of morality, and a ritual of worſhip, all vouchſafed to them by God himſelf; that

[f] Deut. xxix. 5.

Moſes,

Moſes, their Deliverer, their Mediator, and their Guide, after a formal ratification of the covenant with the Almighty, and a prophetic delineation of the bleſſings and the curſes which would inevitably attend their obedience, or diſobedience, has departed from them for ever; that, under the auſpices of his ſucceſſor Joſhua, the tribes are ſettled in their reſpective allotments, preciſely as the holy Patriarch Jacob, in his parting benediction[g], and Moſes after him[h], had predicted that they would be ſettled.

It is ſcarcely credible how ſhort an interval had paſſed, before this perverſe and ungrateful people not only forgot all that they had been taught, and all that they had ſuffered, but violated even the expreſs condition upon which they knew that their exiſtence as a nation depended. Inſtead of acting as the delegates of God, and the miniſters of his vengeance, to puniſh the idolatrous Canaanites to the uttermoſt, they became their partners and companions in wickedneſs, and offered up at

[g] Gen. xlix. [h] Deut. xxxiii.

the ſhrines of the Syrian Deities of Baal and Aſhtaroth, thoſe acts of praiſe and adoration which they knew to belong excluſively to the one true God: thus, although God, as it is ſaid, had "rolled away from them the reproach of Egypt[i]," a greater reproach, and the ſtain of fouler impiety, was fixed upon them.

During the adminiſtration of their judges, the Jewiſh hiſtory preſents to us little more than a picture of their ſtrange infatuation and blindneſs, and of the mercy and long ſuffering of God; a conſtant repetition of the ſame crimes, and the ſame puniſhments, the ſame repentance, and the ſame rewards: idolatry puniſhed by ſlavery, and ſincere acknowledgement of the offence, and return to the worſhip of the true God, rewarded by a reſtoration to liberty, and the poſſeſſion of their promiſed inheritance. Of this diſpenſation of providence, we cannot fail to remark, that the mode of puniſhment, and the mode of reward, which God thought fit to adopt, were calculated in an eminent degree, not only to correct the idolatrous pro-

propenſities of the Iſraelites, but to impreſs ſurrounding nations with a belief of the one true God, and thus to extend more widely the foundations of true religion.

Theſe nations—the nations, that is, who from antient times had poſſeſſed the promiſed land, and the countries bordering upon it, were either the deſcendants of Canaan, or, more properly ſpeaking, of Ham, or the relations and poſterity of Abraham, who gradually migrated to the territories originally deſigned for them by the Almighty: of Lot, for inſtance, came the two great families of Moab and Ammon; of Eſau, the Idumæans; of Madian, the Madianites; and of Iſmael, the Iſmaelites and the Amalekites: and to the hatred which the Canaanites naturally would feel for an invader, who was come to rob them of all their poſſeſſions, to break down their images and their altars, to deſtroy their hallowed groves, and to deface every veſtige of the religion of their anceſtors, the children of the Patriarch Abraham added the animoſity of rivals; of rivals contending for that glorious inheritance, which

had been promiſed originally to all the ſeed of Abraham, without any diſtinction or limitation. In the ſight of theſe nations, therefore, no puniſhment and no reward could be ſo impreſſive, or ſo awful, as the grant or the deprivation of that country, in which they all ſuppoſed they had a right to participate. This therefore was the ſcene which the Almighty choſe for a diſplay of his power; from thence he drove his people when they forgot him, or rebelled againſt him, and forced them to bend their neck under the yoke of the very rivals who hated and deſpiſed them; and thither he brought them back again, when they were repentant and ſorrowful, with "a mighty hand, and outſtretched arm," by the ſingle and unaſſiſted efforts of his choſen ſervants, of Sampſon, of Gideon, of Jepthah, and Deborah. Thus it was, that, during the alternate viciſſitudes of comfort and ſlavery, the nation ſtill continued to increaſe in numbers and in power; and if we go on to the times of their monarchy, when the ſervant of God was called from the ſheep-fold to ſit upon the throne of Iſrael, when "the fame of him

him went out unto all lands, and the fear of him through all nations;" we find, that in repeated conflicts they have conſtantly been victorious, that they have gradually triumphed over their enemies, and extended their dominions almoſt, although not entirely, to the boundaries which God had fixed himſelf, from the "Red Sea even unto the ſea of the Philiſtine, and from the deſert unto the river[k]."

To the extent of country which David acquired by conqueſt, under the peaceful ſway of his ſucceſſor, they added the advantages of commerce. His alliance with Hiram of Tyre, and his marriage with the Egyptian Princeſs, contributed to aid and promote the plans which his own wiſdom had deviſed; and from the ports of Elath and Eziongeber, which he improved and fortified, the wealth of Africa and India flowed into Jeruſalem, until, as the ſacred Hiſtorian informs us, "cedars[l] were as ſycamore trees that are in the vale for abundance, and ſilver in Jeruſalem as ſtones." If, from this period of ſplendour

[k] Exod. xxiii. 31. [l] 1 Kings x. 27.

and proſperity, we go on to the revolt of the ten tribes, and the ſeparation of the two kingdoms of Iſrael and Judah, it appears, that the ancient fondneſs for idolatrous devotion, which had long lain dormant, revived with increaſed ardor. The worſhip of the golden calves at Bethel juſtified the practice, and led the way to all the monſtrous corruptions, and the prophane rites, which the kings of Iſrael were eager to ſanction and encourage. In vain did God by the mouth of his holy Prophets warn them of their danger, and command them to return to the way of righteouſneſs which they had forſaken; neither the picture of ruin and deſolation, which the Holy Spirit was continually preſenting to their imaginations, nor the partial evils which they ſuffered, nor the removal of the flower of their countrymen into Egypt and Chaldea, had any effect upon this deluded people: they perſevered in the open abuſe of their law, and the contempt and defiance of God, until their city and their temple were deſtroyed, and the whole nation reduced to ſlavery. During the whole period of this their greateſt

and

and longeſt captivity, the providence of God was watching over them continually: they were kept diſtinct in every reſpect, and ſeparate from their conquerors. Of Jehoiakim their King, it is ſaid, that "his throne was ſet above the throne of the Kings that were in Babylon [m]." Many of the principal leaders were raiſed to ſituations of power and confidence; and the great body of the people were ordered, by a public decree, to take wives for them and for their ſons, that they "might be increaſed there," as the Prophet tells us, "and not diminiſhed [n]."

Repentance and a confeſſion of their guilt, after the period had elaſped, which was ordained before of God, produced their cuſtomary effect; and the people were reſtored to their country; but not the whole people.

Of the twelve tribes, two only, thoſe of Judah and Benjamin, with the Levites, were permitted to return to Judea. From that time to the preſent, the fate of the

[m] 2 Kings xxv. 28. [n] Jer. xxix. 6.

other

other ten tribes has continued to be involved in obſcurity. Where they have ſubſiſted, what their ſituation has been, and whether at this day traces of them are to be found, as modern travellers inform us, in the plains of Hindoſtan and China, are queſtions of curioſity, which have no concern with our ſubject: and whatever their fate may have been, the prediction of the Prophet would equally have been verified, that "within threeſcore and five years, Ephraim ſhall be broken, that it be not a people[o]." Judah meanwhile, to whom belonged the adoption and the glory[p]; and of whom, "as in the fleſh, Chriſt was to come;" he of whom his Father, in his laſt prophetic benediction, had ſaid, "that he ſhould be more numerous and more powerful than his brethren[q]; and that his polity, as a nation, ſhould not be diſſolved, till the actual appearance of the great Redeemer;" Judah did return to the inheritance of his anceſtors, and rebuilt the holy Temple of God.

From the period of their reſtoration, the

[o] Iſai. vii. 8. [p] Rom. ix. 4. [q] Gen. xlix.

Jews

Jews ſeem entirely to have conquered that fatal attachment to the idolatry of their Heathen neighbours, which had already involved them in ſo many calamities. And as if the warning of Malachi, who cloſed the illuſtrious line of inſpired Prophets, was perpetually ſounding in their ears, "remember ye the law of Moſes, my ſervant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb, for all Iſrael[r]," their obſervance of the Moſaic Law, of its precepts, and its ordinances, appears to have been more ſcrupulous, and more exact, than it had been at any former period of their hiſtory.

In the mean time, their political ſituation was more ſecure, and more ſettled: the Princes of Perſia, whoſe vaſt empire extended over the greater part of the Eaſtern hemiſphere, from India, as it is ſaid in the holy Scriptures of the kingdom of Ahaſuerus, from India even unto Ethiopia, over one hundred and ſeven and twenty provinces[s]"—theſe powerful Princes be-

[r] Mal. iv. 4.

[s] Eſth. i. 1.

ſtowed

ſtowed upon the Jewiſh nation peculiar marks of their favour; and in later times, the great conqueror of the world, who broke this mighty empire, and divided its provinces amongſt his followers, in the career of his victories ſpared the holy city, and granted to its inhabitants all the privileges, and all the immunities, which their anceſtors had enjoyed.

If at this period we look to the circumſtances of the Jews in their own country, we find that they were ſecure from the attack of ſurrounding nations, which before were haraſſing them with perpetual incurſions. Moab was gone: the Holy Spirit had declared, that it would be ſo, that "the ſpoiler ſhould come upon every city, and no city ſhould eſcape: that the valley alſo ſhould periſh, and the plain be deſtroyed [t]." And this had been actually accompliſhed: the Philiſtines alſo, and the Ammonites, had yielded to their fate. And Eſau was actually in ſervitude under the Jews: the very people whom they

[t] Jer. xlviii. 8.

had

had ſcorned and hated, as the poſſeſſors of the birth-right of their anceſtors.

If we look abroad to diſtant countries, and to cities far removed from Jeruſalem, we ſee the followers of Moſes received every where with peculiar marks of favour and diſtinction. At Athens, Corinth, and Epheſus, and all the principal cities of Greece, they had their own ſynagogues; in Egypt, they had their Temple, their Magiſtrates, and a Government of their own: at Antioch, the Law of Moſes was preached continually, and even in Rome: jealous as the Romans were of any privileges, and much as they diſliked the Jewiſh people, there were times, when the Jews were permitted to legiſlate for themſelves.

In the conflicts between the Macedonian Princes of Syria and Egypt, Judea, from its ſituation, was naturally expoſed to perpetual incurſions: but of theſe Princes almoſt all but one were the friends and protectors of the Jewiſh nation. That one indeed, as their Prophets had foretold, was a cruel and mercileſs perſecutor: he defaced the

the holy city, plundered the temple, and pillaged and deſtroyed the inhabitants. But the vengeance of God overtook him, and in his laſt moments he avows what he believes to be the cauſe of his ſufferings: "The ſleep," ſays he, "is gone from mine eyes, and my heart faileth for very care: and I thought with myſelf, into what tribulation am I come, and how great a flood of miſery it is wherein I now am! for I was bountiful and beloved in my power. But now I remember the evils that I did at Jeruſalem; that I took all the veſſels of gold and ſilver that were therein, and ſent to deſtroy the inhabitants of Judea without a cauſe. I perceive therefore, that for this cauſe theſe troubles are come upon me; and behold I periſh through great grief, in a ſtrange land [u]." Such was the confeſſion of Antiochus; and while he was execrated for his cruelty, the nation, which he had oppreſſed, was admired for the intrepidity of its leaders, its undaunted fortitude, and its zeal in the defence of its religion.

It happened however, that unfortunately

[u] Macc. vi. 10. Polyb. Fragm. p. 997. edit. Caſaub.

their

their own internal diviſions ſoon opened the way for a new conqueror; and the Jewiſh nation became at length the tributaries of Rome: but ſtill they continued a diſtinct people; and with the legions of Rome in their city, the religion of Moſes was the ſame, and the authority of the Sanhedrim continued inviolate.

In this latter æra of their hiſtory, therefore, it appears, that they were expoſed to fewer viciſſitudes, and fewer calamities, than in earlier times; that as they had not been contaminated by the vices and the crimes of their forefathers, ſo they had eſcaped their awful puniſhments: they had not been driven from their country, under the ſcourge of the oppreſſor, into exile and captivity; but, with few exceptions, had been permitted to cultivate in peace the inheritance of their forefathers. And in this ſtate they continued, until the appointed time arrived, the time which had been determined from old, upon them and upon the holy city, and until the meaſure of their iniquity was full.

If we look back to the principal epochs

in

in their hiſtory, to their deliverance from Egypt, their ſettlement in Canaan, the flouriſhing days of their monarchy, their captivity in Babylon, and their ſubſequent eſtabliſhment in Judea; it is evident beyond all doubt, that they were miraculouſly preſerved from that ruin, in which it is the fate of all nations to be involved, either by the violence of conqueſt, or the ſilent and imperceptible attacks of time: that God always remembered the covenant which he had made with their fathers, the covenant of Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob; and that, when in the latter days the Meſſiah came unto his own, he found them ſtill exiſting, with a civil polity, and a Religion diſtinct from that of any other nation in the world.

But more than this; if we look to them under all their circumſtances, and all their revolutions of fortune, whether they were proſperous or unfortunate, whether they were at reſt within the fertile borders of Paleſtine, "every man under his vine, and under his fig-tree [x]," or "mourning in ſlavery by the waters of Babylon [y];" we

[x] Mic. iv. 4. [y] Pſalm cxxxvii. 1.

ſee

ſee them ſtill as the agents of the providence of God, who by theſe means was ſecretly carrying on his great deſign, and preparing the world for the introduction of the Goſpel.

It is impoſſible to ſuppoſe upon any principles of human reaſon, that their earlieſt captivity in Egypt, and their extraordinary deliverance, had not a powerful effect upon the minds of all who witneſſed, and all who heard of it; the miracles of Moſes, the rapid augmentation of the Iſraelites, and the deſtruction of the mighty hoſt of Pharoah, were all convincing evidences, that this ſingular people were under the guidance and protection of a God, far ſuperior in power to the fabled divinities of Egypt.

It is equally impoſſible to ſuppoſe, that the conqueſt of Canaan, with all the circumſtances attending it, the defeat of numerous armies by ſmall bodies of men, and ſometimes even by individuals, the immediate overthrow of fortified cities, without any of the ordinary operations of war; and, above all, the exact conformity of the ſucceſſes or

the failures of the Jews, to the obſervance or neglect of their religion—it is not poſſible to ſuppoſe, that they who were witneſſes of facts ſo unuſual, and ſo contrary to the common courſe of human events, would not frequently be induced to turn from the lying vanities of Paganiſm, to the worſhip of the living God. The ſacred Hiſtorians inform us, that this was the caſe, that the number of proſelytes increaſed continually, and that in the beginning of the reign of Solomon they were found to be "an hundred and fifty thouſand, and three thouſand and ſix hundred[z]." The Jewiſh commentators aſſert, with what foundation I cannot pretend to determine, that, in the days of David and Solomon, the Sanhedrim were very cautious in their admiſſion of the numerous Gentile converts to the privileges of Judaiſm, leſt fear of David's power, and admiration of the glory and ſplendour of Solomon, ſhould have been their ſole motives for wiſhing to join in the worſhip of the Iſraelites. If this be true, we muſt ſuppoſe, that the number of converts in thoſe days was very conſiderable; and this number

[z] 2 Chron. ii. 17.

was

was certainly increaſed during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon.

During the whole of that period, the Prophets of the captivity were continually denouncing the wrath of God againſt Idolators, and authenticating the reality of their inſpiration, by the evidence of miracles—and not only the inſpired Prophets, but all the devout Iſraelites, all the ſincere believers in the God of their fathers, were conſtantly exhorting their conquerors to believe and be converted; "Confeſs him," is the language of a pious captive to his countrymen, "Confeſs him before the Gentiles, ye children of Iſrael, for he hath ſcattered us among them: there declare his greatneſs, and extol him before all the living, for he is our Lord; and he is the God of our fathers: in the land of my captivity will I praiſe him, and declare his might and majeſty to a ſinful nation [a]."

From the time that the captives in Babylon were reſtored by Cyrus, they who were left behind ſeem gradually to have

[a] Tob. xiii. 3, 4.

diſperſed themſelves into different ſettlements. The communication between diſtant nations was becoming every day more eaſy and more frequent. The Aſiatic invaſions of Greece had ſhewn the poſſibility of an intercourſe between the two continents; and the Macedonian conqueſt of Aſia effected this intercourſe. Thus the knowledge of the true God, of the Laws, and the Religion, which he had himſelf preſented to his choſen people, was communicated to every part of the civilized world; and in the days of the Apoſtles, "there were dwelling at Jeruſalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven [b]." In the mean time, that the great end of this diſperſion might be fulfilled; that the knowledge of the one true God, and of his gracious intentions to mankind, might be diffuſed more generally, and with greater facility; it was ordained, that the ſacred Oracles of his word ſhould be promulgated in that language, which was not only the language of philoſophy and literature, but the medium of general communication to the Gentile world. When the Greek ver-

[b] Acts ii. 5.

ſion

ſion of the holy Scriptures was made by the Jews of Alexandria, it was in the power of every Gentile to ſtudy the hiſtory of Religion; to trace the origin of mankind; their fall from innocence; the promiſe of redemption; and the prophetic delineations of that glorious perſon, by whom it was to be effected.

It cannot therefore be doubted, that whether the Almighty ſcattered his peculiar people over the face of the earth, or whether he preſerved a remnant in Jeruſalem, it was equally his intention, by both theſe acts of his providence, ultimately to promote the one great deſign of introducing the Chriſtian faith.

I cannot however cloſe the ſubject without obſerving, that the prophecy, from which I have taken the words of my text, points to a farther accompliſhment.

The proud oppreſſors of God's peculiar people have long ago been humbled to the duſt: of them God has made a full end: their power, their wealth, and their mag-

nificence, are gone for ever. If we aſk for Egypt, who was once the glory of the world, the parent of arts and ſciences, and the great mart of induſtry and commerce, has ſhe not long ago exactly verified the declarations of the Prophet, that "ſhe ſhould become a baſe kingdom [c]; that there ſhould be no more a prince of the land of Egypt [d]; and that Ham in his poſterity ſhould be a ſervant of ſervants [e]?" If for Babylon, is ſhe not become "a deſolation, a dry land, and a wilderneſs; a land wherein no man dwelleth, neither doth any ſon of man paſs thereby [f]?" If for Nineveh, did not God long ago accompliſh what he had ſaid, that "the gate of the rivers ſhould be opened, and the palaces diſſolved [g];" and that "with an overrunning flood, he would make an utter end of the place thereof [h]?" Thus the Almighty hath made an end of the nations, who were the enemies and the oppreſſors of his people: but of them he hath not made an end. He hath driven them, it is true, from the holy city, and given up the land of pro-

[c] Ezek. xxix. 14. [d] Ezek. xxx. 13. [e] Gen. ix. 25.
[f] Jer. li. 43. [g] Nah. ii. 6. [h] Nah. i. 8.

miſe

miſe to be trod under foot by the Heathen.

But of the people he hath not made a full end: though perſecuted, oppreſſed, and harraſſed, as they have been, with a cruelty, of which it is difficult to conceive the exiſtence in any civilized country, and ſtill more in any Chriſtian country, their numbers have always increaſed, they continue "to grow and multiply," and they are at this day to be found in every nation under heaven.

Why they are thus reſerved, or what ends of Divine providence they are to accompliſh, we cannot pronounce with certainty, until it ſhall pleaſe the Almighty to remove the veil from our eyes: and that will not be, till all human diſtinctions of religion ſhall be done away; till the Jew, the Gentile, and the Mahometan, ſhall unite in a common faith, and we ſhall all "be one fold under one Shepherd, Jeſus Chriſt the Righteous [i]."

[i] John x. 16. Ezek. xxxvii. 22.

SERMON VII.

DANIEL ii. 20, 21, 22.

BLESSED BE THE NAME OF GOD FOR EVER AND EVER; FOR WISDOM AND MIGHT ARE HIS: AND HE CHANGETH THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS; HE REMOVETH KINGS, AND SETTETH UP KINGS; HE GIVETH WISDOM UNTO THE WISE, AND KNOWLEDGE TO THEM THAT KNOW UNDERSTANDING; HE REVEALETH THE DEEP AND SECRET THINGS; HE KNOWETH WHAT IS IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE LIGHT DWELLETH WITH HIM.

IN this ſimple and ſublime ſtrain of devotion, the holy Prophet offers up his thankſgiving to God, for that communication of the Divine Spirit, which had recently

cently been vouchſafed to the prayers of himſelf and his companions. To this man of the captives of Judah, as he was invidiouſly ſtyled by the attendants of Nebuchadnezzar, God had given that inſight into futurity, which was denied to the magicians and aſtrologers of Babylon; and he was commanded, by the great revealer of all ſecrets, to unfold to the anxious Monarch the revolutions of earthly governments in regular ſucceſſion, until the eſtabliſhment of that glorious kingdom, before which all human dominions, all principalities, and all powers, were to fade away, and ſink into obſcurity.

In that viſion which the holy Daniel was impowered by God to interpret, that viſion which had troubled the ſpirit of Nebuchadnezzar, had broken his reſt, and given him up a prey to ſorrow and inquietude; under the ſymbol of an image compoſed of different materials, the Holy Spirit had repreſented the four great Monarchies, which were ſucceſſively to rule the civilized world.

After

After an interval of ſeveral years, the viſion was repeated, under different ſymbols, to the Prophet himſelf, and the Angel of God was the interpreter. The four Beaſts, like the component parts of the great image, were explained to be the powerful Monarchies, which were to ſucceed each other in a regular order: the fourth to be different from the other three, "dreadful, and terrible, and ſtrong exceedingly[a];" to devour the whole earth, and to tread it down, and break it in pieces.

Of both theſe viſions it may be obſerved, that the prophetical hiſtory does not terminate with the diſſolution and diſmemberment of the fourth Monarchy, but extends its view through a long ſucceſſion of ages, to the triumphant dominion of the Son of Man; the everlaſting kingdom, which all dominions were to ſerve and obey; and thus it connects under one view the eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity, and the fates of the Chriſtian Church, with the various revolutions in the political ſituation of mankind. It would be foreign to my purpoſe

[a] Dan. vii. 7.

to

to enter into a minute examination of theſe awful revelations. I follow the general ſenſe of the moſt approved commentators, in ſuppoſing the four kingdoms of the Prophet to be thoſe of Aſſyria, Perſia, Macedon, and Rome. I have referred to the prophecy itſelf only for the purpoſe of ſhewing, that while the choſen race of Abraham were fulfilling the purpoſes for which they were ſeparated, and diſtinguiſhed as a peculiar people, the Almighty Diſpoſer of all events was gradually bringing the reſt of mankind into that ſtate, which he judged to be the moſt proper, for receiving and propagating the Goſpel of righteouſneſs.

When we turn from the ſacred records of inſpiration to the annals of prophane hiſtory, with the ſame deſign of tracing the gradual preparations for the introduction of the Chriſtian religion, there is a wide difference in the degree of certainty, which attends our concluſions. I had occaſion before to mark this difference, and to obſerve, that, in the one caſe, the interpoſition of Providence is immediate, and evident at once; the agent of God is expreſsly commanded

manded to execute the counſels of Almighty wiſdom; and whether he be the appointed miniſter of vengeance, or of grace, we not only ſee that he is appointed to diſpenſe the bleſſing, or to inflict the puniſhment, as the people are obedient or rebellious, but we are alſo told diſtinctly why he is ſo appointed; and thus the effect produced can always be aſſigned, not to the agency of man, but to its true and original cauſe, the will of God. This could not be the caſe, where the will of man was permitted to act entirely for itſelf, without the continual interference and control of God's particular providence; and in this conſiſted the ſtriking contraſt between the relative ſituation of the Jew and the Gentile: the Jew was ſubject to the particular authority of God as his ſovereign; the Gentile was under the protection of his general providence, and amenable to his general laws, as the moral Governor of the world: ſo that, whilſt every act of the Jew, whether individually conſidered or collectively as a ſtate, was immediately marked by the ſanction or the diſapprobation of God, as their ſupreme Governor,

vernor, the Gentile was permitted to follow, without interruption, the bias originally given to his nature; his paſſions, his affections, his appetites, all tending ultimately to produce the good deſigned by God, while the wiſdom which planned the important end, and the power which directed to that one end all the varied combinations of human conduct, was far removed from mortal eyes.

On this account it naturally becomes a taſk of greater difficulty, to reaſon upon the cauſes of all the complicated events in the hiſtory of the Gentile world: there is more danger of deviating from the truth into unprofitable conjectures, and more neceſſity therefore for that diſtruſt of our own opinions, which ought ever to guide our enquiries into the hidden and myſterious ways of Providence. Surely it is reaſonable to preſume, that the Almighty Governor of the world in his good time would bring his creatures into that particular ſtate of ſociety, and of government, which was likely to be moſt favourable to the eſtabliſhment of the religion, which in

in his mercy he intended to reveal to them; and what that ſtate would be, muſt be collected from the character of the religion, and the mode in which it was to be propagated.

Chriſtianity was not to be like the religions of Paganiſm, a partial ſyſtem of worſhip, confined to the country in which it was firſt taught, or to the people who firſt embraced it; it was deſigned to be the religion of the world, and in God's good time the glad tidings of ſalvation were to be communicated to "all languages, people, and nations, under heaven." But in what way was this to be effected? and were the glorious doctrines of man's redemption from ſin, and reſtoration to eternal life, to be generally diffuſed over the civilized world? and by what force, or what artifice, was that fabric of error and falſehood, which the ſuperſtition of the Gentiles had reared with all its ſplendid accompaniments of ſacrifices, and feſtivals, and oracles, to be demoliſhed for ever?

The Providence of God deſigned from the

the very beginning, that this great change in the religious ſtate of mankind ſhould be produced by methods which human prudence never would have deviſed, and by inſtruments which the vanity of human reaſon would have rejected, had they been propoſed, as totally inadequate to ſuch a taſk. It was not his intention to overpower the feeble minds of his creatures by a diſplay of pomp and majeſty, nor to faſcinate their ſenſes by the allurements of art and elegance, nor to force their will, by the ſword of the conqueror, reluctantly to accept the proffered terms of ſalvation. The pure wiſdom of heaven was to be taught by a few unlearned men, ſelected from the lower claſſes of ſociety, and the moſt ordinary occupations of civil life: they were to go forth alone, and unprotected, and without any even of the cuſtomary proviſions for diſtant expeditions: they were to traverſe remote countries, and to preach the croſs of Chriſt; ſometimes to a refined and poliſhed audience at Corinth, at Athens, or at Rome; and ſometimes to a horde of uncivilized Barbarians in Iberia, or Gaul, or Britain.

It

It is clear therefore, that this gracious deſign of diffuſing the light of the Goſpel of truth over thoſe diſtant nations who "were ſitting in darkneſs and the ſhadow of death," could never be ſo well effected, as when countries the moſt removed from each other in natural poſition were connected by a bond of union under one common government, when habitual intercourſe had been eſtabliſhed between them, and it was eaſy to paſs from one to the other, without danger or interruption.

It was to this point, that the Providence of God gradually directed all the great revolutions in the political ſtate of mankind: and whoever meditates upon the inſtructive page of hiſtory, with this idea in his mind, cannot fail to obſerve, in how many inſtances the plans, which were formed by legiſlators and philoſophers, to connect and aſſociate diſtant countries with each other, and the ſchemes of aggrandizement and univerſal dominion, which were the delight of ambitious conquerors, were all unexpectedly fruſtrated, when upon the principles of human policy ſucceſs appeared to

be certain, until the proper time arrived, ὁ ἴδιος καιρὸς, as the Apoſtle calls it, the time which Almighty wiſdom had choſen before the world began, as the propereſt and the beſt, for the actual appearance of the Meſſiah upon earth.

It would not be poſſible for me, in the compaſs of a ſingle lecture, to enter into the detail of facts which involve the hiſtory of mankind, from the earlieſt ages to the æra of Chriſtianity, or to mark all the circumſtances in the ſucceſſion of the four monarchies, which bear in legible characters the impreſſion of the finger of God. It is enough for my purpoſe to ſhew, that at a certain period of time fore-ordained of God, and not before, the civilized world was to be placed under the dominion of one particular people, and that with a view to facilitate the propagation of the Chriſtian religion: and I do it in the hope, that many of my hearers, whoſe early youth is directed in this place to the ſtudy of prophane hiſtory, will learn to conſider that hiſtory, not merely as a jejune narrative of unintereſting facts, nor as a ſplendid argu-

argument for the pen of the hiſtorian, or the orator, but as a record of the power and providence of God; that they may accuſtom their minds to look beyond ſecondary cauſes; and inſtead of attributing, with mere worldly men, the riſe and growth of empires to the valour of the conqueror, and the ſagacity of the lawgiver, and their decay and ſubverſion to the machinations of the factious, or the attacks of foreign enemies; that they may refer all to the over-ruling providence of God, of him "to whom belongeth the power and the might, who changeth the times and the ſeaſons, who ſetteth up and removeth kings."

It ſeems ever to have been the courſe of human affairs, that a ſmall community ſhould riſe from very poor and low beginnings, till in proceſs of time it became a flouriſhing and mighty empire. The virtues neceſſary to an infant ſtate, ſimplicity, frugality, temperance, patience, and valour, while they formed the character of its citizens, enabled them at the ſame time gradually to extend the limits of their poſſeſſions: firſt the conqueſt of their imme-

diate neighbours, then of remote countries, by degrees give it opulence and power, till in time power and opulence introduce thoſe vices which inevitably terminate in the decay and corruption of every political body. Thus it has often happened, that a mighty empire has fallen in a moment, even in the height of its proſperity, and when, to the narrow views of human policy, its permanence and ſtability appeared to be moſt certain; "dies, hora, momentum ſufficit evertendis dominationibus quæ adamantinis credebantur radicibus eſſe fundatæ [b]."

By this courſe of events, the moral government of God has ever been vindicated, becauſe the miſguided appetites and paſſions of human nature thus eventually bring upon themſelves their own puniſhment: and, in the mean time, the viciſſitudes of proſperity and misfortune; the alternate elevation and depreſſion, which the various nations of the world experienced; and the changes from abſolute dominion to ruin and to ſervitude, tended ultimately to produce that general ſubjection to one

[b] Vide Caſaub. Præfat. quæ Polybii Hiſtor. præmittitur.

power,

power, which was neceſſary to the purpoſes of God.

If we carry back our reſearches to the earlieſt age of mankind, after the confuſion of languages, and the diſperſion of thoſe tribes who had attempted to form a ſettlement in the plains of Shina, the hiſtory of every nation, but that of the choſen people and their immediate neighbours, contains little more than fabulous accounts of migrations and early ſettlements, with doubtful claims to preeminence, and to antiquity. The firſt powerful monarchy that attracts our notice is that of Aſſyria; the firſt, that is, that attempted to aggrandize itſelf by extenſive conqueſts, and to ſubjugate to its power the widely extended provinces of Aſia; and the monarchs of Aſſyria, whether they weilded the royal ſceptre at Nineveh, or at Babylon, neither purſued their conqueſts to any conſiderable diſtance, nor retained them long in quiet and ſecure poſſeſſion: "ſwift and impetuous in their careers as the eagle[c]," to uſe the emblem of the Prophet, they

[c] Dan. vii. 4.

were continually loſing the advantages which they had gained: the univerſal monarchy, at which they aſpired, they never in reality poſſeſſed; and they may be ſaid rather to have been continually contending for it, than to have enjoyed it under any fixed and ſettled form. Often they were the agents of God, to puniſh his choſen people for their diſobedience: and the glory and power of their dominion was at its height when they had carried the tribes of Iſrael and Judah into captivity. But in the pride of their hearts they attributed to themſelves the glory which belonged to God; and while they were acting as the appointed miniſters of his vengeance, they fondly thought that they were promoting the ſchemes of their own ambition. "Howbeit," ſays the Prophet, ſpeaking of the Aſſyrian, "he meaneth not ſo, neither doth his heart think ſo; for it is in his heart to deſtroy and cut off nations not a few: for he ſaith, by the ſtrength of my hand I have done it, and by my wiſdom, for I am prudent, and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treaſures, and I have put down the inhabi-

tants

tants like a valiant man[d]." But the Almighty puniſhed this idle boaſting, he brought to nought the counſels of the ambitious, he numbered their kingdom, and finiſhed it; and he gave up Babylon, the "glory of kingdoms, and the beauty of the Chaldees excellency[e]," as he had given up Nineveh before it, to become a deſolation without an inhabitant. Thus it may be obſerved how cloſely and intimately the fortunes of the other nations of mankind were connected with thoſe of the people of God: Babylon was to be deſtroyed for the deſolation which it had brought upon Jeruſalem; and the choſen ſervant of God, who was at once announced by the Prophet as the deſtroyer of the Aſſyrian monarchy, and the deliverer of the Jewiſh nation, was alſo to become the founder of a new empire, more extenſive, and more powerful far, than the former.

The founder of the Perſian monarchy was endowed by God with a more than ordinary ſhare of talents and of virtues, and bleſt with a conſtant ſeries of victories and

[d] Iſai. x. 7—13. [e] Iſai. xiii. 19.

proſperity. "The Lord of Iſrael," ſays he, in the decree which he iſſued for the reſtoration of the Jews, "the Lord of Iſrael, the moſt high Lord, has made me King of the whole world[f]." Coming forth from a poor and barren country, and inured from his earlieſt childhood to toils and hardſhip, he became, under the protection of the Almighty, the ſovereign of a powerful empire, whoſe boundaries to the Eaſt and Weſt were the Indus and the Ægean Sea; to the North, the Caſpian and the Euxine; and to the South, Ethiopia and the Arabian Gulph. Under the dominion of his ſucceſſors, the Aſiatic empire of the Perſians was enlarged and confirmed: but all their attempts to ſubjugate the nations of Europe were fruitleſs; the time for uniting the two continents under the ſame dominion was not yet arrived.

It is one of the moſt curious and inſtructive leſſons in the hiſtory of mankind, to obſerve with what unerring certainty the ambition of the Perſian monarchs, and their eager deſire to ſubdue the free re-

[f] 2 Chron. xxxvi. 22. Ezra i. 2.

publics

publics of Greece, terminated in their own deſtruction; to mark how the reſtleſs ſpirit of thoſe turbulent democracies, their jealouſy and hatred of each other, and their own internal diſſenſions, reduced them to ſubmit at laſt to a foreign yoke; and then to notice how the accompliſhment of their long projected vengeance upon their eaſtern enemies was reſerved for him whom God had choſen to be the conqueror of Aſia. Of that extraordinary perſon, whoſe brilliant atchievements have been at all times the conſtant theme of undiſtinguiſhing panegyric, I have only to remark, that, in obeying the dictates of his own inordinate ambition, he carried on the general deſign of Providence; that with wiſdom to deviſe, and vigour and promptitude to execute, any project of conqueſt, of whatever extent or magnitude it might be, there is ſcarcely a doubt, humanly ſpeaking, but that he would have become in reality, what his flatterers and panegyriſts have called him, the maſter of the world; that he would have opened a ſecure and eaſy communication between the ſeveral nations of his vaſt empire; that he would have con-

connected them by alliances and intermarriages, have enriched them by commerce, and perhaps have poliſhed and refined them by arts and literature. But the hour was not yet arrived; and it pleaſed the Almighty to cut off this mighty conqueror in the very prime of his life, and in the full career of his victories. It was not, however, by his own premature death alone, that the vices of Alexander, his pride, his intemperance, and his ſanguinary cruelty received their puniſhment; the juſt vengeance of God purſued him to the ruin of his houſe, and the deſtruction of all his deareſt connections. The extenſive dominions, which his proweſs had acquired, were ſplit and divided, as the Prophet of God had declared that they ſhould be; and the endleſs diſputes and diſſenſions of his ſucceſſors converted the world into a theatre of war and bloodſhed, and deſolated the faireſt provinces of Europe and Aſia. In the mean time, that people, for whom God had deſtined the ſovereignty of the univerſe, had been gradually increaſing in ſtrength and conſequence; the valour of their ſoldiers, and the wiſdom of their ſenators, had been uni-

uniformly directed from the very firſt dawn of their power, to the aggrandizement of their territories. No opportunity was ever loſt, no means were neglected, either in peace or war, by open force, by ſtratagem, or by alliance, of extending the boundaries of their dominion; and they were now in a ſituation to avail themſelves of thoſe diſtractions, which convulſed the empire of Macedon.

To trace the progreſs of the Roman power, until its favourite object of univerſal empire was obtained, would be to detail a trite and well known ſtory; and the fact of its having obtained it, is all that is neceſſary for me to inſiſt upon at preſent. "Macedon," ſays an hiſtorian, who flouriſhed in the days of the empire, "never did reduce the world to obedience; for neither did it poſſeſs all Africa, nor all Europe. But Rome does rule over all the earth as far as it is inhabited; and all the ſea, not only the Mediterranean, but alſo the ocean as far as it is navigable; having firſt and alone, of all the celebrated kingdoms

of

of the earth, made the Eaſt and Weſt the bounds of its empire[g]."

Thus we have ſeen that the uniform plan of Providence was preſerved throughout; that the Monarchs of the Eaſt, although they ſtyled themſelves the Lords of the univerſe, and, in the hyperbolical language of their country, were uſed to addreſs their public decrees to all nations, people, and languages upon earth, were in reality limited to their Aſiatic poſſeſſions; and that every attempt to extend their dominion, and to eſtabliſh an univerſal empire, was checked and retarded, until the appointed time was come; and the people, for whom this dominion was reſerved, were able to acquire and maintain it.

It remains only briefly to conſider, in what way the ſubjection of the world to one government tended to promote the intereſts of Chriſtianity.

Chriſtianity, as I have ſaid above, was to

[g] Dionyſ. Halicarn. Antiq. Rom. lib. i. p. 3. Edit. Hudſon.

be

be propagated by human means, by argument, by perſuaſion, by a fair and candid addreſs to the underſtandings of mankind; and this appeal was to be made perſonally by thoſe, to whom the bleſſed Author of our faith had committed that important office.

Now if the ſeveral nations, to whom the Goſpel was preached, had been unknown to each other; if there had been no connection or intercourſe between them; if their governments had been hoſtile to each other, it is ſcarcely poſſible to conceive, how the Apoſtles could have executed their taſk, unleſs indeed we ſuppoſe the interpoſition of Providence, by a continued miracle, diſtinct from thoſe miracles, which were the true and proper credentials of their miſſion.

And if ſuch a difficulty as this may be conceived to have exiſted in the caſe of the Apoſtles, of courſe it would have been greater in that of their ſucceſſors, when the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit were withdrawn, when the mighty ſign and wonder

no

no longer accompanied the teacher, but every thing was left to the exertions of human induſtry and abilities. But the Almighty provided for the ſafety of his infant Church, by deferring the appearance of its holy Founder, until ſuch channels of communication had been opened, and till the preachers of righteouſneſs could ſpeak, in the name of the bleſſed Jeſus, to every nation under Heaven.

It has been obſerved, and perhaps with reaſon, that, if Judea had not been a Roman province at the time of our Saviour's birth; if the Jews had not been ſubject to the juriſdiction of the Empire, and conſequently enrolled in the general regiſter of the imperial ſubjects, the prediction of the Prophet would not have been verified, "that out of Bethlem ſhould come forth a Saviour, whoſe goings forth were from old, from everlaſting [h]." It has alſo been obſerved, which is a point of ſtill greater importance, that if there had not been a Roman Governor in Jeruſalem, the Jewiſh Sanhedrim, by their own law, could not

[h] Mic. v. 2.

have

have condemned our bleſſed Redeemer to that death, which it was ordained that he ſhould ſuffer as an atonement for the ſins of Man.

If there be truth and reaſon in theſe remarks, they are an additional evidence of the goodneſs of God, who was continually watching over his creatures, and guiding their wayward and unſteady paſſions, by his unerring wiſdom, to the minute accompliſhment of his gracious purpoſes. But all that I have endeavoured to ſhew is, that the world was ſubjected to the dominion of Rome, in order to facilitate the promulgation of the Goſpel.

The holy Prophet, from whoſe volume I have taken the words of my text, by the general tenor of his Prophecy, ſeems, if I do not miſtake, to point to ſuch a concluſion in thoſe wonderful productions, which the venerable Mede has called "the ſacred Calendar and Almanack of Prophecy:" it is eaſy to trace one great deſign throughout.

The four Monarchies are to riſe in regular

lar ſucceſſion, to exceed each other in power and extent of territory; and the fourth is to ſurpaſs the other three, and to poſſeſs the whole earth. But the Prophecy cloſes not there: in the hallowed ſtrain of inſpiration, the Prophet goes on to paint the diſſolution of this mighty Empire, the ſeveral parts into which it was to be broken, the ſufferings of the true Church, and, finally, the everlaſting kingdom of Chriſt. We know that the remarkable predictions of the holy Daniel, which relate to events prior to the publication of Chriſtianity, were fully confirmed; that the bittereſt enemies of the Chriſtian faith confeſſed, that they were ſo. We have a right therefore to conclude, that what relates to events ſubſequent to that period will be verified alſo; and, with this reflection to cheer him, a Chriſtian ought never to deſpond. For whatever be the fate of earthly governments and human inſtitutions; whatever be the fate even of thoſe eſtabliſhments, by which human prudence hath cheriſhed and ſupported true Religion, we have a ſure and certain hope, that Chriſt at laſt will be "all in all;" and under every diſtreſs and perſe-

perſecution of this life, we may look forward with confidence to that awful moment, which the Prophet, in his magnificent language, has taught us to expect; "when the Son of man ſhall come with the clouds of Heaven; and he ſhall come to the *Ancient of Days*; and there ſhall be given to him dominion and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, ſhould ſerve him; his dominion is an everlaſting dominion, which ſhall not paſs away, and his kingdom, that which ſhall not be deſtroyed[i]."

[i] Dan. vii. 13, 14.

SERMON VIII.

GALATIANS iv. 4.

WHEN THE FULNESS OF TIME WAS COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON.

ST. Paul, throughout the whole of his Epiſtle to the converts of Galatia, is taking pains to warn them againſt the artifices of thoſe falſe teachers, who wiſhed to impoſe upon them the work of the Levitical ceremonies: "There was a time," he ſays, "when thoſe ceremonies were neceſſary; when the rite of circumciſion, the attendance at the ſtated feſtivals of the Jewiſh Church, and the obſervance of the Sabbatical years, were not only allowable,

but obligatory;" but that all thoſe ordinances, which, in fact, were nothing more than faint and partial repreſentations of the truth, were now at an end, for that "the fulneſs of time was come," when the Son of God had appeared to redeem thoſe who were under the bondage of the law. This expreſſion of the Apoſtle, "the fulneſs of time," which he uſes upon other occaſions, as well as in this addreſs to the Galatians, may be underſtood in two ways; for it may either mean, that all the previous ſteps by which God had determined to open the way gradually for the final revelation of his will to man, were now completed, and that nothing more of preparation, or introduction, was neceſſary; or it may mean, that the period, at which our Saviour entered upon his miniſtry, was, from the exiſting circumſtances of the world, the fitteſt that could have been deviſed for the publication of the Goſpel.

What the preparations were, by which the great ſcheme of Providence was gradually conducted to its accompliſhment, it has been the object of my former Diſcourſes

courſes to enumerate. We have ſeen, that a peculiar people were ſeparated from the reſt of mankind, to preſerve the belief of the one true God; that a country of peculiar fertility was aſſigned to them for their reſidence; that God himſelf was their King; that while the ceremonies of their religion preſcribed an outline, a ſhadow of the good things of which their future Meſſiah was to be the body and the ſubſtance; a ſucceſſion of inſpired Prophets from time to time unfolded the glorious plan of redemption, ſpecified the ſeaſon at which the Redeemer was to appear in mortal ſhape, and the nature of the ſufferings which he was patiently to endure; and that, in order to ſecure the permanence of this preparatory ſyſtem, for ſo long a time, at leaſt, as its exiſtence was neceſſary, the providence of God miraculouſly preſerved the Jewiſh people, with their civil polity, and their religion, in the form originally delivered to them by their inſpired Legiſlator; the reſt of mankind, in the mean time, being brought, by the controul of God's providence, into that political ſituation, which was moſt likely to facilitate the general diffuſion of the Goſpel.

To aſſign the reaſon for every ſtep in this gradual preparation, is a taſk beyond the reach of human abilities. In that one comprehenſive plan, which extends from the very foundation of the world to the final conſummation of all things, there muſt neceſſarily be many hidden motives, and many nice connections between the effect and its cauſe, which will elude the ſearch of beings who ſee imperfectly, and know only in part: but even our limited knowledge, faint and imperfect as it is, enables us to pronounce, that had the Son of God come into the world at an earlier period of ſociety, or without any previous introduction, the holy leſſons which he taught, and gracious promiſes which he announced to man, would have died away, in the very infancy of their promulgation, unleſs we ſuppoſe, that human nature had been differently conſtituted; that the Creator had taken away from his creatures the power to will, and to act, and had interpoſed, by a conſtant miracle, diſplayed in every part of the univerſe, to teach mankind his will, and to enforce obedience to it.

And if on this account we can judge of

of the neceſſity of the preparation, it is alſo within the compaſs of our knowledge to judge of its effect—ſo that we have only to appeal to the evidence of facts: for it is an hiſtorical fact, that when our Lord came into the world, he did actually find the choſen race of Abraham, amidſt the errors and corruptions of Idolatry, ſtill worſhipping "the one true God," "the God of their fathers," in the very form, and with the very ceremonies, which Moſes their Lawgiver, by the command of God, had preſcribed to them. He found them alſo waiting, with the moſt anxious ſolicitude, for his appearance: for while the impious ſcoffer ventured to accuſe the Almighty of ſlowneſs and forgetfulneſs, in the execution of his promiſe, all pious and devout perſons, like "the aged Simeon," and "the daughter of Phanuel," were looking for the conſolation of Iſrael, in the full confidence, that, whatever might be the cauſe of ſo long a delay, God had not forgotten the promiſe of redemption, which had ſo often been repeated to their fathers.

The whole of Judea indeed, Herod, and

all Jeruſalem with him, was troubled, when the birth of the holy Jeſus at Bethlehem was announced; ἐταράχθησαν, is the very ſtrong expreſſion, which the Evangeliſt uſes; they were thrown into an agitation: ſome, no doubt, dreading the power of that glorious Perſon, who at length was come to rule over them; others anticipating the ſplendour of his victories, and the unlimited extent of his dominions; and perhaps the few of better minds and juſter expectations, looking forward with delight to a reign of peace, and equity, and righteouſneſs. Nor were theſe expectations confined to the Jews: it was a current opinion, derived unqueſtionably from the Prophecies of Holy Writ, that about this period of time an extraordinary Perſon would appear in the Eaſt; that he would be a powerful and mighty Prince, and would ſubject all the nations of the earth to his dominion.

The ſame Prophecies, which raiſed the expectation of the Meſſiah, furniſhed the means of knowing him, when he actually came: it was natural to expect, that impoſtors

poſtors would avail themſelves of this general eagerneſs; that, under the glorious title of the promiſed Deliverer, they would ſummon their countrymen to their ſtandard; and would attempt to acquire power and opulence for themſelves, under the ſpecious pretext of reſcuing their country from the Roman yoke. God therefore had given his people infallible criteria, by which they were to diſtinguiſh their Meſſiah from all ſuch falſe Chriſts, and falſe Prophets. Was he of the tribe of Judah, and of the lineage of David? Was he born at Bethlehem? Could he control or ſuſpend the operations of nature; reſtore ſight to the blind, and vigour and activity to the cripple? Did he know all things? Could he penetrate the ſecret thoughts of the human heart, and unfold the hidden events of futurity? Theſe were teſts, by which, not only men of education and learning, the chief Prieſt and the Scribe, but the illiterate deſcendant of Abraham, in whatever ſituation of life he was placed, had been taught to diſtinguiſh the character of their Chriſt.

So far then it may be ſaid, that the "fulneſs of time was come;" becauſe it was the time which the Holy Spirit had fixed, for the appearance of the great Deliverer of mankind; becauſe he was univerſally expected; and becauſe all the methods, by which God thought fit to prepare for his approach, had been brought to full maturity. Theſe, however, are the reaſons, why God did not ſend forth his Son at an earlier period. But to know why this period was fitter for his appearance than any other would have been, why a farther delay would not have been practicable, conſiſtently with the merciful deſign of improving the moral condition of mankind, and fitting them for the enjoyment of everlaſting happineſs; to underſtand "the fulneſs of time" in this ſenſe, it will be neceſſary to conſider, what really was the ſtate of mankind, when the Saviour of the world entered upon his public miniſtry, and what they actually knew of their duty to God, and to each other. When the holy Forerunner of the Meſſiah announced to his countrymen the ſpeedy approach of the kingdom of Heaven, and warned them to

ſave

ſave themſelves from future miſery, by a timely repentance, the general depravity of mankind, both of Jews and Gentiles alike, was at its height; a depravity, which purſued its courſe without any check or control; for they who wiſhed to ſtem the torrent, had not the power of doing it; they had no barrier to obſtruct its progreſs, nothing but a vague, ſpeculative morality, and a nominal religion, without any real influence upon the heart, or the underſtanding.

The Jews (for I will firſt conſider the circumſtances of the Jewiſh Church), the Jews, from the time of their captivity in Babylon, had been punctual in their obſervance of the Moſaic Law; that is, they had never relapſed into that Idolatry, of which their forefathers had been guilty. Whether it was, that the remembrance of former ſufferings had taught them to conquer their natural propenſity to adopt the vices of their neighbours, or that the moſt corrupt and the moſt vicious did not return with their brethren to the land of promiſe, or that the nearer approach of the

great

great Redeemer kept them in continual awe and ſuſpenſe; whatever was the real cauſe, the fact is undoubted, that at no period of their hiſtory were the Jews ſo tenacious of their own law, or ſo free from the baſe and abominable contamination of Idol worſhip.

But it does not follow, becauſe they had leſs Idolatry, that they had therefore more true Religion; the very reverſe of this was in fact the caſe. Worſhippers of the one living God they certainly were; in the holy Temple of Jeruſalem, however inferior it might be to the ſplendid fabric of Solomon, all the high ſolemnities of the Moſaic ritual were celebrated ſtill in honour of the God of Iſrael: but the popular opinions of their God, the notions which were generally entertained of his nature and his attributes, were very unworthy of him. Accuſtomed, as they had been, to conſider the Lord Jehovah as the tutelary God of their nation, the Jews confined to themſelves all the benevolent acts of his Providence; and admitting that he was the Creator and the Governor of the univerſe, they

they ſtill proudly and fooliſhly ſuppoſed, that they were the ſole and excluſive objects of his paternal ſolicitude. Many of them had been taught to fix their minds upon ſymbolical repreſentation of the Divine preſence; and they were yet to learn, that the God of their fathers was a pure æthereal ſpirit, and that he was only "to be worſhipped in ſpirit and in truth."

Followers of the Moſaic Law they were undoubtedly; but in the mode of obſerving its precepts, there was far more of ſuperſtition, than of true and ſincere piety. Such of its minute ordinances as were inſtituted for temporary purpoſes, to wean them from their attachment to Egyptian ſuperſtitions, or to guard them from the abominations of the nations of Canaan, were now of little avail; and, without any prejudice to their religion, might have ſunk into total diſuſe. But thoſe the bigotted Jew eſteemed as highly as the weightier matters of the Law; as the neceſſary ceremonies of his ritual, or the important obligations of the Decalogue; while the rulers of ſynagogues, the guides

and

and inſtructors of the people, ſo far from correcting their errors, impoſed upon them an additional weight of ceremonies, and required them to pay the ſame obedience to their own abſurd traditions, as they did to the ſacred mandates of the Law and the Prophets.

That the Moſaic Law in its beſt ſtate, and when entirely free from the gloſſes and fanciful additions of the Cabbala, was defective in many points, cannot be denied, and it had the defect neceſſarily belonging to it, as a preparatory diſpenſation. The Law made nothing perfect, but was the introduction of a better hope: it was a partial law, ſuited to the circumſtances of one particular people alone, and limiting its ſervices to a particular place. It permitted, if it did not ſanction, acts, which natural reaſon diſapproves, and which the law of univerſal righteouſneſs poſitively forbids; and paſſed over others in total ſilence, which this latter and more perfect law enjoins as duties. As a ritual worſhip, its true and only uſe was, to preſerve the people from the contagion of idolatry, and,

by

by the uſe of expiatory ſacrifices, to accuſtom them to the idea of vicarious puniſhment, and to prepare their minds for the great Chriſtian doctrine of atonement to be made for the ſins of man by the blood of the Redeemer. As a rule of ſocial duty between man and man, it was incomplete, becauſe, although it checked and repreſſed the inordinate affections of man, and forbad all flagrant violations of moral juſtice; yet we try in vain to find in it the duties of mutual forbearance, or forgiveneſs of injuries, of lowlineſs of mind, of patience, humility, and all enduring charity.

Fully competent therefore, as it was, to anſwer the purpoſes which God deſigned it to anſwer, as a law of general obligation it was materially imperfect: it neither taught men their duty to each other, nor qualified them for acceptance, and pardon with God: it was, as the Apoſtle calls it, "a miniſtry of death and condemnation [a], a ſubjection to a curſe [b], a killing letter [c]."

[a] 2 Cor. vii. 9. [b] Gal. ii. 13. [c] 2 Cor. iii. 6.

But

But the Law, faulty as it was in itſelf, was rendered ſtill more ſo by the corruptions, which the Jews themſelves had introduced into it, by the diſputes of their ſectaries, and the chimerical inventions of their Rabbins.

At the head of their Church were the Phariſees, a corrupt and odious ſect, whoſe principles and conduct are uniformly marked by our bleſſed Lord with the ſevereſt terms of reproach. With all the external appearance of ſanctity; with a pious demeanor, and an oſtentatious parade of devotion in public; the Phariſee had only the ſemblance of piety, without any real purity of heart, or any proper ſenſe of religious duties: in his ideas, minute attention to dreſs, to his prayers, and his phylacteries; the exact performance of the legal ablutions, and a ſcrupulous obſervance of the holy day of reſt, were more than ſufficient to compenſate for the neglect or the violation of the great obligations of morality. That he ſhould be called into another exiſtence after this life, he did believe; but of future judgment, or future retribution, he ſeems to have had no expec-

expectation. His ſoul, he thought, after death, would reanimate ſome other body, different from his, and totally unconnected with it. Conceiving therefore, as he did, that all merit conſiſted in the punctual performance of ceremonies, and that that alone would entitle him to the favour of God, beneath the ſpecious maſk of piety and devotion, he concealed a corrupt heart, a depraved and ſenſual appetite, and a temper moroſe, unforgiving, and uncharitable.

The Sadducee, on the other hand, the rival and opponent of the Phariſee in the purſuit of worldly ambition, was the decided enemy of thoſe traditions, which the other prized ſo highly; he adhered ſtrictly and literally to the written precepts of his Divine Legiſlator. But then he did not ſee, as he might have ſeen, in the ſacred Volume of his religion, any intimations whatever of a future life: all his views, and all his expectations, were limited to the preſent world: the rewards which he hoped to receive, if he obeyed the commandments of his law, were power, and wealth, and temporal proſperity; and the only puniſhment

niſhment which he dreaded was the loſs of worldly advantages, of rank, of opulence, or popular reputation.

Under the guidance of ſuch inſtructors as theſe were, without a Prophet to cenſure their vices, and to call them to repentance, their God not interfering, as he had done in the days of their anceſtors, to check the progreſs of iniquity by immediate puniſhment, the Jewiſh nation gradually roſe to ſuch an enormous pitch of profligacy and wickedneſs, that, as their own hiſtorian confeſſes (and ſurely he cannot be accuſed of want of partiality for his countrymen), if the Romans had delayed to ſtrike the blow, God would have puniſhed them by an earthquake, or a peſtilence, or perhaps have poured down upon them, in fire, the fury of his vengeance, as he did in early days upon the guilty cities of Sodom and Gomorrah [d].

Let us now turn from the Jews to the Gentile world, and ſee whether the Heathen, when the Goſpel of righteouſneſs was

[d] See Joſephus Antiq.

offered

offered to him, poſſeſſed any knowledge of religious duty, or any moral law, which the Jew had not.

It had pleaſed the Almighty, for what reaſon it would be folly and preſumption in man to enquire—but it had pleaſed the Almighty "to wink at," "ὑπεριδειν," to overlook the times of Gentile ignorance: the whole race of mankind, with the exception of the choſen people of Iſrael, had been left to the guidance of the unwritten law implanted by the Creator in the hearts of all his creatures, and to the feeble light which they could derive from the corrupt traditions of primitive revelations.

Whatever effect the law of nature, or the light of reaſon, might have had upon the few, who could think and reaſon, it never can be ſuppoſed to have had any practical influence upon the great maſs of mankind. The popular ſyſtems of Heathen mythology, and the ceremonies of Heathen worſhip, inſtead of purifying the heart, and correcting the evil propenſities of human nature, were, in fact, a fertile ſource of er-

ror in opinions, and profligacy in practice. Corrupt and diſſolute manners, the open violation of decency, and the ſhameleſs indulgence of licentious paſſions, were the fatal but neceſſary conſequences of the exhibitions, the ſhews, and the feſtivals, which the ritual of Polytheiſm required. The temples of their Gods were too often the ſcene of the moſt ſcandalous exceſſes, while the deluſions of their Oracles, which were now become a conſtant theme of ridicule, and the artifices of their Prieſthood, which the man of letters delighted in expoſing to the vulgar, gradually inclined them to doubt the reality of what they had been taught; to think that there was no ſuch Being exiſting as a God, and that the whole fabric of Religion was a ſyſtem of falſehood, the invention of artful ſtateſmen and politicians.

Thus then, ſaid the freethinker, meaning to inſinuate that the Chriſtian Revelation could not be neceſſary, the evil of Polytheiſm corrected itſelf: but how did it correct itſelf? By creating in the mind a general indifference to all religion whatſoever: and it would be a difficult taſk to ſhew,

that

that mankind would have been better, or happier, had Atheiſm been ſubſtituted in the place of Polytheiſm.

But was there no check to be found then, or no controul, to reſiſt the torrent of impiety? Could not the light of reaſon teach men to ſubdue the lawleſs violence of their paſſions? And had not philoſophy ſufficiently inveſtigated the proper motives of human conduct, and fixed a certain and unerring rule of moral obligation?

Far be it from me wantonly to depreciate the labours of the illuſtrious few, who quitted the abſtruſe reſearches of metaphyſics, for the more plain and more uſeful inveſtigation of moral duty; who taught that there was a Supreme God, by whoſe power the world was created, and by whoſe Providence it was governed; that man, as a ſocial being, was to conſider the utility and the happineſs of the community to which he belonged, as the rule of his conduct; that the ſoul of man was immortal and immaterial; and that, after the diſſolution of the body, it would ſtill have life and

vigour, and continue to exiſt in another ſtate.

Sacred be the memory of thoſe, who, after they had purſued their inquiries as far as it was poſſible for unaſſiſted reaſon to go, with the humility of real ſcience, ſcrupled not to aver their ignorance: the beſt and the wiſeſt of them declared, that none but a teacher from Heaven could remove his doubts; and had it been his fortune to have heard the admirable wiſdom of that bleſſed Teacher, he would have been amongſt the foremoſt to hail with joy the dawn of ſo glorious a day: before the pure and perfect wiſdom of the Goſpel he would have caſt down all the unprofitable theories, the high imaginations, and the idle boaſtings of human reaſon, and have acquieſced with gratitude in the revealed will of God.

Unfortunately, however, the influence of the beſt philoſophy was confined to the few who profeſſed it, and to their immediate followers. Truths, which are only to be learnt by a regular deduction of reaſon, are not calculated for common minds; the faireſt

faireſt ideal pictures of virtue, however juſt, or however beautiful they might be, had no allurement for the generality of mankind; and even the hope, or the expectation, of a future exiſtence was of little real ſervice, when it was a matter of doubt, whether the ſoul, after its ſeparation from the body, was to be conſcious of what had been done in that body or not; whether it was to be loſt in the immenſity of the Deity, from whom it originally emanated; or to be joined to another body, and to repeat the ſame viciſſitudes of acting and ſuffering upon earth, in endleſs revolutions.

If ſuch was the inefficacy of thoſe ſyſtems, which alone deſerve the name of philoſophy, what was to be expected from the croud of diſputants, who contended for fame and victory, and not for truth; from thoſe who could juſtify by arguments the worſt exceſſes, or thoſe who maintained, that all actions were equally indifferent; that nothing in nature was either good or bad; and that vice and virtue were diſtinctions invented by man, and only to be found in the inſtitutions of human policy?

Or what reaſon was there to ſuppoſe, that the morals of the vulgar would be reformed, when the practice of the very philoſophers themſelves was continually at variance with their principles; when they, who inculcated a contempt of riches and honours, were eager to gratify the purſuits of worldly ambition; when the teacher of humility was notorious for his pride; and the advocate of temperance indulged in all the exceſſes of the groſſeſt ſenſuality?

In ſuch a painful ſtate of uncertainty, unable to comprehend the principles of the true philoſophy, and perplexed and bewildered by the intricate ſubtleties of the worſt, the generality of mankind eagerly attached themſelves to that ſect, which promiſed to ſatisfy their ſcruples, and to allay their fears. That they would emancipate mankind from the ſhackles of ſuperſtition, would empower them to think and act for themſelves, and teach them the true uſe of their reaſon, was the ſpecious boaſt of Epicurus and his ſchool; and this glorious liberty was to be acquired by the rejection of all thoſe great truths, which were

were the cement of human ſociety, and the foundation of all our happineſs.

The Epicurean had no God, or if he had a God, it was a God without a Providence; a God, ſlumbering in eaſe and indolence, and careleſs of the fate of the wretched mortals, who were to wander at will, amidſt the cares, the perplexities, and the dangers of their exiſtence upon earth: and without the belief of a God, he had no idea of moral reſponſibility, and no expectation of future judgment.

In his intercourſe with mankind, all his views, and all his motives, terminated in ſelf; his own profit, and his own pleaſure, were the only incitements, that could rouſe him into activity: and neither friendſhip, nor good faith, nor juſtice, were regarded any farther than as they contributed to promote his intereſt, or to gratify his pleaſure.

This was the prevailing ſyſtem of the times; it was the faſhionable Philoſophy, which all deſcriptions of men began to admire, and to adopt: to the vulgar and the illiterate,

literate, it offered the enticing proſpect of freedom from all reſtraint, and emancipation from all obligation; to the learned and the wealthy, it recommended itſelf, by the elegant manners of thoſe who profeſſed it, by the charms of beautiful poetry, and the refined vøluptuouſneſs which it juſtified and recommended.

Thus, if Philoſophy had been permitted to take its courſe, inſtead of improving and cultivating the light of nature, it would have extinguiſhed it entirely; it would have robbed its votaries of all that could make them virtuous or happy; and have plunged the miſerable race of man into the thick and gloomy darkneſs of Atheiſm. But at this period preciſely, when the world was almoſt without religion; when the Jew had nearly loſt the ſpirit of the Moſaic Law, and corrupted the letter of it by his fanciful interpretations; and the Gentile, by his falſe philoſophy, had thrown a miſt over the feeble light of natural reaſon—at this period, "God ſent forth his Son, to teach the way to righteouſneſs," and "to awaken ſinners to repentance."

Surely

Surely then we cannot but admire the wiſdom of God, and adore his goodneſs with humble gratitude, for ſending into the world the Heavenly Inſtructor whom he had promiſed, at the very moment that his inſtructions were moſt neceſſary to the happineſs of his creatures.

But if the neceſſity of a better guide and a wiſer teacher was admitted, how did it happen, that when a Teacher came, calling himſelf the Son of God, and proving his title by miracles—how did it happen, that the Jews rejected, and perſecuted even unto death, the very Perſon whom they had ſo long expected; and that the Gentiles, above all, the rich, the powerful, and the learned, who ought to have been amongſt the earlieſt converts, treated the Religion, which he offered them, with ſcorn and deriſion, and purſued his followers with the bittereſt malignity? Is not this a proof, ſays the unbeliever, either that he was not in reality the Perſon whom he profeſſed to be; or that his doctrines did not contain the leſſons of wiſdom and righteouſneſs, which we maintain they did?

The

The fact is undoubted; but the inference, which the Sceptic would draw from it, by no means follows: on the contrary, the conqueſt which Chriſtianity obtained over the obſtacles, by which its enemies tried to retard its progreſs, is in itſelf the ſtrongeſt proof, that it really was the word of God.

The general depravity of the times, the decay of all practical Religion, and the want of proper criteria, by which to diſtinguiſh right from wrong, created prejudices againſt the Goſpel of Chriſt, which were common to all mankind, to Jew and Gentile alike. The very firſt awakening call to repentance, by which the harbinger of the Meſſiah had proclaimed his near approach, contained a command, to which minds hardened in wickedneſs, and accuſtomed to the uncontrouled indulgence of their paſſions, could not immediately reconcile themſelves. But when the holy Teacher appeared himſelf in perſon, they found, that the whole ſyſtem of his Religion was founded upon this doctrine of repentance; that, in order to become his diſciples, and to ſhare the rewards of his king-

kingdom, they muſt abandon, without delay, all their habitual indulgences; they muſt renounce and execrate the vices which they had practiſed with impunity, and with humble and ſincere contrition muſt confeſs their own unworthineſs, and their utter inability to obtain ſalvation, without the free grace and pardon of God.

From ſo humiliating a confeſſion, the pride of the Jewiſh Teacher and the Gentile Sophiſt revolted at once: in the mean time their appropriate characters, and their reſpective ſituations, gave them other prejudices, and other prepoſſeſſions, peculiar to each.

The Jew had always miſunderſtood the promiſe originally made to the Patriarch, and repeated continually by every one of the inſpired Prophets. He had accuſtomed himſelf, as is well known, to expect not a Spiritual deliverer, or a Spiritual kingdom; but a mighty Prince, and an earthly Sovereignty. Ever inclined to faction and ſedition, and uneaſy under the dominion of Rome, the Jewiſh people looked for a leader,

leader, who would drive out the imperial legions from Jeruſalem, and extend his conqueſts far beyond the confines of the Holy Land. All their ambitious views therefore were demoliſhed at once, when they ſaw the Perſon, who announced himſelf as the Chriſt, entering the holy city; not with the ſplendid pageant of a conqueror, but "meek, and lowly, and ſitting upon an aſs[d]." All their dreams of conqueſt and dominion vaniſhed, when they ſaw, that, inſtead of calling his followers to a military ſtandard, or animating them with the hope of that liberty, for which they pined, his time was paſſed in healing the ſick, and cheering the unhappy; in dictating to the poor and the lowly the plain and eaſy leſſons of his pure morality; and promiſing even to publicans and ſinners, the bleſſed fruits of repentance, and the glorious hope of eternal life. And all the viſionary ſchemes of grandeur and power faded away before them, when they found, that, to obtain an inheritance in his kingdom, they muſt quit the poſſeſſion of worldly honours and worldly riches; muſt for-

[d] Matth. xxi. 5.

ſake

ſake their kindred, their families, and their friends, and become the poor and perſecuted followers of a deſpiſed Nazarite.

The Jew had alſo been taught to expect, that his Law would be perpetual; that its ceremonies were of univerſal obligation; and that the holy Temple of Jeruſalem, in the days of the Meſſiah, would be thronged with ſuppliants from all the nations under heaven. He was perſuaded alſo that ſalvation belonged excluſively to himſelf, and was to be obtained only by the punctual obſervance, not of the Moſaic ritual merely, but of all the frivolous ceremonies, which the Scribe and Phariſee had ingrafted upon it. What then was his ſurpriſe, his mortification, and his reſentment, when he heard from the mouth of our bleſſed Lord, that his kingdom was reſerved not for thoſe who purified their bodies by ablutions, but for the pure in heart; when he ſaw him, as he thought, violating the Law, and deſpiſing the Sabbath, and declaring, in juſtification of his practice, that "God would have mercy, and not judgment!" What was his indignation, when he heard, that the

the Apoſtles were commiſſioned to announce "the tidings of ſalvation to all nations" indiſcriminately, and to declare, that God was not to be adored in this or that particular place, but that the reaſonable ſervice of the heart might be offered to him in every climate, and by every created being!

To the anger, which the defeat of their fondeſt hopes, and the loſs of their favourite projects, excited in the nation at large, the leaders of the people, the chief Prieſts and Elders, the Scribes and Phariſees, added a peculiar ſpirit of reſentment and revenge againſt the practice of our bleſſed Lord; for he had unmaſked their hypocriſies, and expoſed their vices to the multitude: thus they all conſpired to execute the eternal purpoſe of God—for "of a truth, Lord," ſays the ſacred hiſtorian, "againſt thy holy child Jeſus, whom thou haſt anointed, the people of Iſrael were gathered together, for to do whatſoever thy hand and thy counſel determined before to have done [e]."

[e] Acts iv. 27.

The

The Gentile, to the prejudice which he had in common with the Jew, added alſo particular prepoſſeſſions of his own: whilſt the corruption of his morals, his profligacy, and his wickedneſs, rendered him equally averſe to a Religion of purity, of conſtraint, and ſelf-denial, his indifference and careleſſneſs about all religions prepoſſeſſed him againſt that, which claimed an excluſive preference above all others. Chriſtianity, in his idea, was a gloomy, unſocial ſyſtem of Atheiſm; for the followers of Chriſt declared, that they would hold no fellowſhip or correſpondence with the works of darkneſs; that the idols of Paganiſm were an abomination; and that it was an impious act even to enter the Temples conſecrated to the impure divinities.

To the proud Sophiſt, it was a thing ſtrange and incredible, that a God had appeared upon earth, in a ſtate of poverty and humiliation, and had ſubmitted to a painful and ignominious death; that the perſons, whom he had appointed to diſſeminate the precepts of his Religion, were not men of learning and education; not Philo-

ſophers, but plain, unlettered Fiſhermen; and that the hiſtories, which recorded his actions, and his diſcourſes, were written in a ſimple, inartificial method, without any of the graces of ſtyle, or compoſition.

The magiſtrate and the ſtateſman meanwhile dreaded the introduction of a new Religion, which tended immediately to effect a change in all the cuſtoms and habits of life, and to overthrow all the rites and ceremonies, which long practice had eſtabliſhed.

Thus it appears, that they, who rejected the deſire of all nations when he came, were influenced by their own corruption, and their own fatal prepoſſeſſion; and it is, as I obſerved before, an inconteſtible evidence of the truth of our holy Faith, that it triumphed over all thoſe obſtacles; that, in ſpite of diſtreſs and perſecution, the number of its converts increaſed continually; and that, in God's good time, it became the eſtabliſhed belief of the Gentiles.

Still,

Still, ſays the adverſary of our Faith, granting its progreſs, what were its effects? Did it really accompliſh the purpoſe for which, you ſay, it was providentially introduced at that particular period of time? Did it inſtruct mankind in their duties to God, and to each other? And are men wiſer and better now, than they were before the eſtabliſhment of the Chriſtian Faith?

Now in order to determine, with fairneſs and candour, what the efficacy of Chriſtianity really has been, and to aſcertain, as far as we are permitted, why it has not been greater, we muſt recollect what was the real deſign of its inſtitution, and what was its true character.

Chriſtianity profeſſes to give mankind a moral Law, for the regulation of their conduct in this life; and to point out to them the means, by which they are to obtain everlaſting happineſs in another.

Whether the moral Law be not as perfect as it is poſſible for us to conceive;

whether it does not far ſurpaſs all the ſyſtems of Ethics, which human reaſon had framed, and all the precepts, which God had before vouchſafed to reveal, it is eaſy to determine, by opening the ſacred volumes of the Evangeliſts and the Apoſtles: there we find "a new commandment," delivered to us by the bleſſed Jeſus, "that we love one another." There we find that humility, meekneſs, moderation, forbearance, and charity, are the virtues, which can alone make us happy in ourſelves, or uſeful to our fellow-creatures. There too we find that the evil inclination, the riſing wiſh, and the ſecret intention to ſin, are as guilty in the ſight of God as the criminal act itſelf.

Such then being the morality of the Goſpel, ſalvation and future happineſs are offered to us, after a virtuous and religious life; not in conſequence of our merit, but as the free and voluntary gift of God, obtained for us by the precious blood of our Redeemer.

This ſyſtem, in both its parts, is offered to our acceptance; our aſſent to it is not extorted

extorted from us; we are required to examine its evidences, and to receive it upon conviction; it is offered to us therefore, as beings reſponſible for our opinions and our actions; and it leaves us, as it found us, free agents: we may therefore miſtake or miſinterpret its doctrines, from ignorance or from prejudice, or, from the ungoverned impetuoſity of paſſion, we may tranſgreſs its plaineſt commands.

If then the efficacy of Chriſtianity has been partial, let the fault reſt with man, and not with God; and let us not dare impiouſly to arraign the juſtice or the mercy of the Creator, becauſe his creatures have not profited, as they ought, by the ſalutary leſſons, which he has given them: at the ſame time, it cannot be denied, but that the real and poſitive efficacy of Chriſtianity has been very conſiderable. If we look to the earlieſt period of its promulgation, the morals of the earlieſt converts, the unexampled purity of their lives, and the ſteady fortitude, with which they ſubmitted to perſecution, to tortures, and to death, while they evince the ſincerity of

their belief, at the ſame time, are a deciſive proof of the ſtrong influence of their religion upon their minds.

If we trace the courſe of civilization, we ſhall find, that the progreſs of Chriſtianity has ever been accompanied by progreſſive reformation, and improvement in the laws, the literature, and the manners of mankind. It was the mild and peaceable ſpirit of the Goſpel, that ſtopped the ſanguinary ſports, which, with all their boaſted refinement, the nations of antiquity delighted to behold: it was the ſame ſpirit, that checked the wanton barbarity, with which the maſter was authoriſed to tyrannize over his ſlave: it is the ſame ſpirit, that has mitigated the grievouſneſs of war, and taught contending nations, that a ſtate of warfare need not impede the exerciſe of the duties of common humanity; that the extenſion of ſcience, and the courteſy of individuals to each other, might ſtill be maintained.

To the morality of the Goſpel private life is indebted for all its comforts, and all its regulated enjoyments; and the ſorrows, which

which he cannot avoid, are comparatively light to a Chriſtian, becauſe he has the bleſſed hope of futurity before him; and under the unequal diſpenſations of this life, he anticipates the time, when the Father of mankind will ſummon all his creatures to judgment.

If then Chriſtianity has already done ſo much, it may fairly be preſumed, that it will do more; that its influence bears a proportion to its progreſs; and that, when its glorious light is diffuſed impartially over the whole world, its efficacy will become complete. Then we may expect, that the ſtormy paſſions, which at preſent agitate and convulſe the moral world, will be huſhed into repoſe, and the whole race of man will be knit together in the bonds of Chriſtian charity, and univerſal love. Then all the imagery of the Prophets, and all their beautiful deſcriptions, will be realized: "the wolf ſhall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard ſhall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together, and a little child ſhall lead them [f]." "The wilderneſs and the ſo-

[f] Iſai. xi. 6.

litary place ſhall be glad; and the deſert ſhall rejoice, and bloſſom as the roſe [g]." "For judgment ſhall dwell in the wilderneſs, and righteouſneſs remain in the fruitful field; and the work of righteouſneſs ſhall be peace; and the effect of righteouſneſs, quiet and aſſurance for ever [h]."

[g] Iſai. xxxv. 1. [h] Iſai. xxxii. 16.

SER-

SERMON IX.

MATTHEW xxviii. 19.

GO YE THEREFORE, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS.

SUCH was the parting command, which the Son of God gave to thoſe righteous perſons, who had been the companions of his miniſtry, and to whoſe guardianſhip he had committed his infant Church. "Go," ſaid he, "to every creature, without any diſtinction or partiality, and preach to all the doctrines of repentance, and remiſſion of ſins:" and, that they might not be diſcouraged by the difficulty of the taſk, he cheered them with the conſolatory promiſe of

of his conſtant aſſiſtance, for "Lo," ſaid he, "I am with you alway to the end of the world."

From this command and this promiſe, it is evident, that the religion, which the Son of God came in "the fulneſs of time" to eſtabliſh, was not like the law of Moſes, or the ſuperſtition of Paganiſm, a partial, local, or temporary ſyſtem of worſhip, but was deſigned to connect the whole race of man in one common faith, and to endure till the final diſſolution of the world. Such was the language, in which the Holy Spirit had invariably ſpoke of that kingdom, which the Redeemer of mankind was to found; that it was to be univerſal in its extent, and perpetual in its duration: "in thee," ſaid the Almighty, when he firſt announced to the Patriarchs the merciful deſign of redemption, which had been formed before the world began; "in thee, and thy ſeed, ſhall all the nations of the earth be bleſſed[a]." And as the ſcheme is gradually unfolded, as the intimations of future deliverance become more explicit, and the

[a] Gen. xii. 3.

delinea-

delineation of the perſon and character of the Deliverer more minute, the religion which he was to preach is always characterized by the ſame properties of univerſality and perpetuity.

"In Judah," ſays the royal Pſalmiſt, alluding to the peculiarity of the Jewiſh covenant, and the limitation of their worſhip to a particular country—"in Judah was God known, and his name was great in Iſrael;" "in Salem was his tabernacle, and his dwelling-place in Sion [b]." But not ſo does he ſpeak of the Meſſiah; for God ſaid unto his Son, "I will give thee the Heathen for thine inheritance, and the utmoſt parts of the earth for thy poſſeſſion." At one time we are told, in the figurative language of Prophecy, that in the laſt days, "it ſhall come to paſs, that the mountain of the Lord's houſe ſhall be eſtabliſhed on the top of the mountains, and ſhall be exalted above the hills, and all nations ſhall flow unto it [c]." At another, that "there ſhall be a root of Jeſſe, which ſhall ſtand for an enſign to the people, and to it ſhall

[b] Pſalm lxxvi. 1, 2.

[c] Iſai. ii. 2.

the

the nations ſeek [d]." Sometimes the prevalence of Chriſtianity is ſpoken of by the Holy Spirit, as the eſtabliſhment of the kingdom of the Lord: "all nations," it is ſaid, "ſhall remember and turn unto the Lord, and all the kindreds of the nations ſhall worſhip before him, for the kingdom is the Lord's [e]." And ſometimes in loftier ſtrains the Prophet celebrates the extent and continuance of this empire: "the kingdom of God, it is called, and an everlaſting dominion extended over all people, nations, and languages, that ſhould not paſs away, nor be deſtroyed [f]."

The Prophets therefore having taught us to expect, that Chriſtianity would in God's good time become an univerſal Religion; and the bleſſed Jeſus having directed his Apoſtles to publiſh the glad tidings of ſalvation to all mankind, how are we to account for its partial propagation, or why, it may be aſked, at the preſent day, do we ſee the Jew ſtill inflexibly adhering to his law, and the diſciples of Mahomet ſtill adoring the hallowed name of their falſe Prophet, whilſt

[d] Iſai. xi. 10. [e] Pſal. xxii. 27. [f] Dan. vii. 14.

a con-

a conſiderable part of the habitable world has never yet emerged from the dark and barbarous ſuperſtition of Paganiſm?

It is natural, doubtleſs, for every reflecting mind, when it contemplates the moral and religious condition of man, to aſk, why it is, that the truth hath been ſo partially communicated? why it is, that ſo many myriads of created beings are ſtill permitted to continue in ignorance of thoſe doctrines, which Chriſtians maintain to be neceſſary to the future ſalvation and happineſs of us all: and whether it be not reaſonable to ſuppoſe, that before the cloſe of ſeventeen centuries, "at the name of the holy Jeſus, every knee would have bowed," and every tongue have confeſſed the wonders of his love to man?

It will ſcarcely be denied by any man, who hath ever opened the volume of our Faith, that Chriſtianity, whether we conſider it as a rule of moral obligation, or a ritual of religious ſervice, or as the union of both, is far more calculated for general uſe, than any other religion that ever exiſted

in

in the world. Let thoſe who doubt it, compare the Goſpel of Chriſt with the Law of Moſes, with the Koran of Mahomet, or with the multifarious ſuperſtitions of the Heathen; and then they will confeſs the decided ſuperiority of the Chriſtian Law. The moral precepts of the Goſpel are adapted to every poſſible variety of climates, of ſituation, and of employment: they all flow from the ſource of univerſal charity, that charity which teaches us, that as the children of one common parent, as ſubject to the ſame viciſſitudes of miſery and happineſs here, and heirs of the ſame immortality hereafter, we are to commiſerate and relieve each other, to live for others more than for ourſelves, and to "do unto all men, as we would they ſhould do unto us." The duty of prayer, the ſecret unoſtentatious worſhip of the heart, which God, under a former diſpenſation, had declared to be more valuable and more pleaſing to him than all the incenſe of ſacrifice and burnt-offering, and which Chriſt enjoined by his precepts, and ſanctioned by his practice—this great duty is as univerſally practicable, as it is univerſally obligatory.

The

The Chriſtian is not called upon like the Jew of old, or the Mahometan of our days, to quit his uſual reſidence, and his ordinary occupation, to traverſe diſtant and inhoſpitable countries, and to proſtrate himſelf before the Altar of his God at a ſtated ſeaſon, and in a particular place; he is not burthened with a yoke of particular ceremonies, of periodical ablutions, which purify the body, but not the heart, or of minute and trifling obſervances, which vex and harraſs the mind, inſtead of relieving and conſoling it. The two ſimple ſacraments, which mark the profeſſion of his faith, interfere with no local duty, and interrupt none of the neceſſary occupations of civil life: and his firſt and earlieſt leſſon, to love his God, to believe in him, to ſerve him, and to pray to him in ſecret, it is eaſy for him to practiſe at all times, and in all circumſtances, in the place of his cuſtomary reſidence, in the boſom of his family, or in the private receſſes of his cloſet.

Thus, while the moral precepts and the religious exerciſes of Chriſtianity are adapted to the circumſtances of every individual,

dividual, the religion itſelf, as a ſyſtem, is compatible with every form of political ſociety. While it is indeed the only baſis upon which any government can exiſt with ſtability and firmneſs, it neither preſcribes to man any particular form of government, nor refuſes to connect itſelf with any. It gives the outline, the great and fundamental principles, upon which the very exiſtence of civil ſociety depends, moderation, good order, and ſubmiſſion to eſtabliſhed authority: but it leaves to the wiſdom of man to determine in what way thoſe principles are to be applied; and what form of public inſtitution is moſt congenial to his character and his circumſtances, and moſt likely to enſure his happineſs.

If then there be nothing in Chriſtianity itſelf, to impede its progreſs; if, on the contrary, it addreſſes itſelf to all men alike, and is conſiſtent with every poſſible form of civil community, this alone is a convincing proof, that the Omniſcient Author of our faith originally deſigned it for the uſe and the comfort of all his creatures.

The

The Sceptic, the haughty Sophiſt, or the indifferent Polytheiſt, might indeed foolifhly and ignorantly maintain, that the ſupreme Being did not require or expect uniformity of worſhip; nay, that he even took delight in the varied forms of devotion, which the ingenuity of his creatures deviſed, and the different and even contradictory opinions, which they formed of his nature and his attributes. But he, who believes that God is one, will inſtantly revolt from ſo monſtrous an opinion; he will know, that the unity and ſimplicity of truth can alone be pleaſing to Him; and that, as the Creator of the world, the Author of all good, and the benevolent Father of mankind, he cannot but chooſe to diſpenſe his bleſſings with an impartial hand to all his creatures. It is on this ground, that we are at iſſue with the Deiſt: I admit, he would ſay, that if God were to communicate to man a ſyſtem of religious belief, ſuch as Chriſtianity profeſſes to be, we might conclude, as well from the nature of God, as from the character of the Religion, that all men would be Chriſtians; that all would have heard the word and received

it, and have embraced with joy the certain hope of everlaſting life: but the fact is otherwiſe; therefore, his concluſion is, that becauſe the Religion is not general, it is not the word of God.

Now, in the very principle of this objection, there ſeems to be at firſt ſight a ſtrange abſurdity. If Chriſtianity be not really a Divine revelation, if its morality be no better than human ſyſtems of ethics, if its promiſes of future life be deluſive and falſe, why lament, that it is not communicated univerſally? If it be true, why call upon us to reject the precious gift of God, becauſe there are perſons exiſting in the world, to whom He has not yet vouchſafed to impart it?

To call the Almighty partial, is as abſurd as it is impious; becauſe whatever revelation of his will the Creator thinks fit to make, it muſt be, on his part, a free voluntary gift; the creature can have no right to demand it: and if it be not diſtributed in equal portions to all, we have no more right to murmur at the diſpenſations

of

of God, than we have to complain, that all men are not preciſely alike, that they have not the ſame health, the ſame ſtrength, the ſame perſonal beauty, and the ſame mental endowments; that they were not placed higher in the ſcale of created beings, that they were not angels inſtead of men!

Is it not equally abſurd and impious, to call the beneficent Author of our being unjuſt, when he himſelf hath condeſcended to tell us, that we ſhould be tried, not only by what we know, but by what we are capable of knowing; that he will make allowances for want of talents, want of opportunities, and all the defects of unavoidable ignorance; and, as I had once before an occaſion to obſerve, that the precious ſacrifice of the Redeemer extends its influence to all mankind, even to thoſe whom the day-ſpring from on high has never viſited; "for thou waſt ſlain," ſays the Apoſtle, "and haſt redeemed us unto God by thy word, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation[g]." If then God hath voluntarily given us more than we have a right to

[g] Rev. v. 9.

aſk, and hath declared, that he will not puniſh his creatures for an ignorance, which they cannot avoid, every ſuſpicion of partiality or injuſtice is done away at once; and we have only to admire the mercy and the wiſdom of God, in preſerving throughout the uniform plan of gradual revelation, and in accommodating the holy leſſons of his will to the circumſtances and capacities of thoſe who were to receive them.

God did not ſend forth his Son till "the fulneſs of time" arrived, till men felt their want of a guide and inſtructor from heaven, and were duly prepared to liſten to his inſtruction. But the warning voice of the Almighty had not at any time been ſilent; God had ſpoken to his fallen creatures at "ſundry times, and in divers manners;" he had promiſed in early times, that a Deliverer ſhould one day come to reſcue them from the dominion of ſin; by his holy Prophets, he had repeatedly aſſured them, that the promiſe would be performed; and, as the appointed hour drew near, he had given clearer intimations of his

his deſign, and ampler deſcriptions of the nature of the deliverance, which they were to expect. Thus, the awful doctrine of redemption was unfolded by degrees, at diſtinct intervals of time, and only to one particular people, choſen by God, to be the guardian of his revelations. From all others it was purpoſely withheld; and even they, to whom the truth was revealed, neither felt its full value, nor comprehended its real purport.

If we turn to the prophetical deſcriptions of the Redeemer's kingdom, we find, that one of the marks, by which it is conſtantly characteriſed, is its gradual progreſs. This progreſs is repreſented under various images: ſometimes the kingdom of heaven is a ſtone, which gradually becomes "a mountain, and fills the whole earth [b];" ſometimes it is a tender plant, which, under the foſtering hand of God, is reared to a fair and goodly tree. "I will take," ſaith the Lord God, "of the higheſt branch of the high cedar, and will ſet it; I will cut off from the top of his young twigs a tender

[b] Dan. ii. 35.

one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Iſrael will I plant it; and it ſhall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar; and under it ſhall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the ſhadow of the branches thereof ſhall they dwell[i]." Sometimes it is a "river whoſe waters are at firſt ſhallow, till by degrees they riſe to a great height, and become waters to ſwim in, a river that cannot be paſſed over[k]."

In ſtrict conformity with theſe prophetical deſcriptions of his kingdom, and with images of a ſimilar nature, our bleſſed Lord informs the Jews, that the kingdom of heaven will be progreſſive, that its complete eſtabliſhment will not be immediate, but that it will advance from ſmall beginnings, till it has poſſeſſed the whole earth. "The kingdom of heaven," ſays he, "is like unto a grain of muſtard ſeed, which indeed is the leaſt of all ſeeds; but when it is grown, it is the greateſt amongſt herbs, and becometh a tree, ſo that the

[i] Ezek. xvii. 22, 23.

[k] Ezek. xlvii. 5.

birds

birds of the air lodge in the branches thereof[1]."

It was the deſign therefore of God, that Chriſtianity ſhould be progreſſive, and that as its publication had been delayed until "the fulneſs of time" was come, ſo its full and complete efficacy ſhould be delayed, until the whole race of man were fully qualified to receive its ſaving truths. But here the queſtion of the captious objector returns: Why was this progreſs neceſſary? Could not the Goſpel have been preached at once in all places? and would it not have been better to have given to all men at once the opportunity of embracing it if they pleaſed?

That God could have done this, had it ſo ſeemed good to his eternal wiſdom, cannot be denied, for "with God all things are poſſible:" but then, we muſt ſuppoſe a conſtant miracle, or a miracle ſo frequently repeated, that it would have ceaſed to be a miracle, and would have loſt all its force and efficacy, as an evidence of truth.

[1] Matt. xiii. 31. Mark iv. 31. Luk. xiii. 19.

Upon no other ſuppoſition whatever, can we conceive the general diffuſion of the great truths of Chriſtianity, without any preparation, any previous moral diſcipline, or any foundation of knowledge.

Follow the miſſionary into the hut of the Indian, and obſerve what a fruitleſs taſk it is to preach the croſs of Chriſt crucified, to bid the ſavage repent, and confeſs his ſins, and be baptized into the faith of the bleſſed Jeſus.

What impreſſion can ſuch a ſummons make upon a mind that has never been taught to elevate its thoughts above the ſenſible objects immediately before it? From the teacher of Heavenly truth he turns with contempt to the objects before him, to the glorious luminary, whoſe ſplendid orb he contemplates with aſtoniſhment, or even to the ſhapeleſs maſs of wood or ſtone, which he conceives to be the reſidence of a Being ſuperior in power to himſelf; who directs all the wonderful operations of nature, and rides in the ſtorm and the whirlwind.

And

And can we expect in ſuch circumſtances to find converts, rational and ſincere converts to the Chriſtian faith? Or is it any impeachment of the authenticity or the truth of the Goſpel, that when its doctrines have been preached to ſuch hearers, they have either been unwilling to liſten, or unable to comprehend them?

We who are Chriſtians by education, who imbibe in our very infancy the firſt rudiments of our faith, who receive it as an impreſſion upon our minds, long before we are capable of examining its evidences, and believing upon conviction, we are ſcarcely competent judges of the difficulty of preaching the faith of Chriſt to thoſe who have every thing to learn, and who in ſome inſtances do not poſſeſs even the great fundamental truths of natural religion.

And it muſt be obſerved, that no argument, drawn from the converſion of the Gentiles in the Apoſtolic age, can be applicable to the propagation of the Goſpel in theſe times. There is no ſimilarity whatever between the two caſes: that converſion

verſion was a miracle. The pride of learning, the obſtinacy of ignorance, the faſtidious contempt of the rich, and the ſanguinary cruelty of the perſecutor, all gave way before the irreſiſtible force of truth. But why was this the caſe? It was becauſe the Apoſtle went forth to execute his miſſion, under the immediate guidance of God. When he addreſſed the aſſemblies of the learned, the Holy Spirit gave him utterance, that he might confound the wiſdom of the wiſe, and make vain the fooliſhneſs of men: and when he ſpoke to the ignorant multitude, the ſign and the wonder accompanied his reaſonings, and convinced them, that he was a meſſenger from God.

The Chriſtian miſſionary has no ſuch advantages: in the difficult and important enterprize of converſion, he has nothing to truſt to but the powers of his own mind, aſſiſted indeed, as we believe all good and pious deſigns will be aſſiſted, by the ordinary grace of God, but without any of thoſe gifts or graces, which were poured down ſo liberally from Heaven upon the choſen preachers of Chriſt. He has to argue,

gue, to perſuade, and if poſſible to convince; but he cannot ſtrike the minds of his hearers by a ſtrain of inſpired eloquence, nor overcome the ſtubbornneſs of ignorance by a diſplay of ſupernatural power.

Surely then we may infer, that if the taſk of inſtruction be committed merely to human agency, if all the extraordinary aids of the Spirit be withdrawn, ſome previous knowledge muſt be neceſſary to form the mind of the convert; and want of civilization will be always an impediment to the general diffuſion of the Chriſtian Law.

This impediment it is eaſy for man to ſee, and perhaps it may be in the power of man to remove it. It is a natural obligation; natural reaſon teaches us, that if we poſſeſs any knowledge, which is likely to improve the condition of our fellow creatures, or in any degree to promote their happineſs, we are bound to communicate it to them. In the caſe of religious inſtruction, the command of our bleſſed Lord to his Apoſtles is binding upon every Chriſtian, and every Chriſtian may hope to receive

ceive the benefits of that gracious promiſe, that he would accompany and aſſiſt his faithful diſciples in the execution of the truſt committed to them, "even unto the end of the world."

If the attempt to diffuſe the light of the Goſpel more widely has not hitherto been attended with all the ſucceſs that Chriſtians could have wiſhed, it by no means follows, that it will never ſucceed. The counſels of God are not to be meaſured by our impatience: the time, which to beings of ſo fleeting and tranſitory an exiſtence as ours, appears to be of endleſs duration, to an eternal and infinite God is as nothing, a mere point in the boundleſs ſpace of eternity; and, in the unſearchable ways of his providence, there may be numberleſs reaſons for delay, which our feeble capacities cannot fathom.

We are not therefore to be diſcouraged, becauſe the ſucceſs of our endeavours has not been anſwerable to our hopes; and acting under the authority of a Divine command, we are not to ſuppoſe, as it has ſome-

ſometimes been fooliſhly argued, that it is wrong in man to try to haſten what God evidently purpoſes to retard; and it may be worth while to conſider after all, whether we attribute our failure to its true cauſe. Do we know whether the motives of the teacher have always been pure, or the mode of his inſtruction always wiſe? In tracing the hiſtory of the attempts to propagate the Chriſtian faith, have we not cauſe too often to lament, that the conqueror has forced his trembling captives reluctantly to take the baptiſmal vow, and that the emiſſary of the Papal ſee hath made the miniſtry of the Goſpel ſubſervient to the purpoſes of ambition, and diſcredited the ſanctity of his religion, by accepting conditional vows, and partial confeſſions of the truth?

If the motive upon which we act be right, it can ſcarcely be doubted, whether we are performing an acceptable ſervice to God or not. In attempting to diffuſe the knowledge of his will, let no ſuch groundleſs doubts repreſs our zeal; for, after all that we can do, we may reſt aſſured, that our feeble

feeble efforts will never accelerate what the wiſdom of God hath choſen to delay, and that the "fulneſs of the Gentiles will not come in" till the hour arrives, which God hath appointed from all eternity.

To his choſen people, to thoſe who were under the protection of his peculiar providence, and of whom it was ſaid, that "to them ſalvation belonged;" to this favoured race, God hath promiſed, if we interpret aright the oracles of his word, that the hour ſhall come, when "their eyes ſhall be opened, and their hearts no longer hardened," and they ſhall ſee and confeſs, that the Meſſiah, whom their fathers crucified, and whom they ſtill ſo obſtinately reject, is very Chriſt and God."

"The children of Iſrael," ſays Hoſea, "ſhall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a ſacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: afterward ſhall the children of Iſrael return, and ſeek the Lord their God, and David their King; and ſhall fear the Lord and his goodneſs in

in the latter days[m];" and "it ſhall come to paſs," ſays Zechariah, "in that day, that I will ſeek to deſtroy all the nations that come againſt Jeruſalem; and I will pour upon the houſe of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jeruſalem, the ſpirit of grace and of ſupplications; and they ſhall look upon him whom they have pierced, and they ſhall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only ſon[n]." Theſe are two out of many prophecies, which point to the ſame great event; but theſe are two of the moſt remarkable, and they cannot be thought to allude to any event, or to any ſituation of the Jewiſh nation, prior to the crucifixion of our bleſſed Redeemer. Upon all theſe prophecies of the Old Teſtament, the holy Apoſtle of the Gentiles is the beſt commentator; he warns his converts, not to triumph and inſult over the Jews, as if they were the outcaſts of God, and aliens from his favour, for "blindneſs has happened," it is true, ſays he "unto Iſrael; but it has happened only in part—it will ceaſe when the fulneſs of the Gentiles ſhall be come in, and then all Iſrael ſhall be ſaved[o]."

[m] Hoſ. iii. 4, 5. [n] Zeck. xii. 9, 10. [o] Rom. xi. 25.

In

In what way conviction will operate at laſt upon the mind of the Jew; whether he will yield his aſſent to the arguments of Chriſtian writers, or whether the irreſiſtible grace of God will withdraw the miſt from his eyes, it is not poſſible for us to determine. However this may be, it is enough for us to know, that he will be at length convinced; and we muſt wait in ſilent awe, and with full and certain confidence, that all the deſtinations of Divine wiſdom, as they have been announced to us by the voice of Prophecy, will receive their full accompliſhment.

Chriſtians meanwhile will be wanting to their duty, if they do not perſevere in their endeavours to convert that miſtaken people to the true faith; if they do not lay before them the evidence which they poſſeſs in every poſſible ſhape, and try, by every argument, to overcome their rooted prepoſſeſſions. Chriſtians will do well alſo to remember the injunction of the Apoſtle; "Boaſt not thyſelf againſt the natural branches; be not high minded, but fear: for if God ſpared not the natural branches, take heed, leſt he alſo

alſo ſpare not thee[q]." Our humble efforts, and our diſcreet endeavours, to forward the great cauſe of truth will receive, we may be aſſured, the gracious aſſiſtance of God; and to an attentive obſerver it muſt be evident, that his providence is continually opening the way for the general diffuſion of the Goſpel: for what other reaſon can we ſuppoſe, that the powers of Chriſtendom were permitted to extend their empire to the Weſtern world? and why elſe is the adventurous ſpirit of modern navigators ſo frequently rewarded by the diſcovery of new countries, and untried channels of communication between the various inhabitants of the globe? The wiſh to inſtruct then ſhould keep pace with the power and the means of inſtruction; and it ſhould be the firſt and greateſt duty of Chriſtian countries, to impart to others the bleſſings of civilization, which they have long enjoyed themſelves; to call the ignorant barbarian from the purſuit of his ſcanty and precarious ſubſiſtence, to the enjoyment of the comforts, the conveniencies, and the elegancies of ſocial life, and to give him the

[q] Rom. ii. 12. 21.

leiſure and the opportunity to prepare his mind for the reception of thoſe ſacred truths, which are to connect us all in the unity of ſpirit, and in the bond of peace. The preparation of cauſes, it is true, may be diſtant; but when God himſelf has vouchſafed to announce his deſign, we cannot err in tracing them ultimately to that deſign; and ſurely in the ſucceſsful cultivation of ſcience, in the correction of flagrant errors, both in doctrine and in practice, in the enlarged and liberal intercourſe between remote countries, and the invention of that art, which facilitates the diffuſion of knowledge, we may diſcern the hand, that is imperceptibly guiding us to the great and final change in the religious ſtate of mankind.

Perhaps too amongſt the cauſes which ſeem likely to promote and extend the knowledge of Chriſt; to the love of *true* ſcience, I may be permitted to add, the hatred and contempt, which we now entertain of thoſe falſe and pernicious tenets, which chimerical theoriſts have long been attempting to force upon us.

Bleſſed

Bleſſed be God, that odious Philoſophy, which was diffuſing its baneful poiſon through every country of Chriſtendom, hath loſt the attractions which it once poſſeſſed. It has been tried, and we know it by its fruits; and it is to be hoped, that our ears will no more be inſulted by fulſome panegyrics upon uncivilized ignorance; we ſhall not again be told, that a ſtate of nature is preferable to a ſtate of civilization; that a ſavage in the deſert is a better, wiſer, and happier being, than an educated Chriſtian; and that if a man be moral, it matters little what God he adores, or whether he be a diſciple of Jeſus Chriſt, of Moſes, or of Mahomet.

While the operation of moral cauſes is thus ſilently going on, under the control of Providence, the partial ſufferings, the misfortunes, and the deprivations, which afflict the viſible Church of Chriſt, ought not to depreſs the hope of the believer, or raiſe the wanton triumph of the infidel, becauſe it is ſtrictly conformable to the general tenor of the Divine government, from the evil which prevails in the world, from the fierce

fierce conflict of human paſſions, and the oppoſition of human intereſts, ultimately to produce that good, which the Divine nature requires.

Sorrow, perſecution, and martyrdom, are the trials of the faithful ſervant of God, and "for him that overcometh there is reſerved a crown of immortal glory." To the Chriſtian Church, the Holy Spirit hath promiſed, after perſecution, and diſtreſs, and apoſtaſy, a long period of retribution and reſt upon earth, "when the power of the evil one ſhall be overthrown, and the Saints of the Moſt High ſhall reign." "Of the times, or the ſeaſons, no man knoweth; the Father hath put them into his own power[r]."

Let the Chriſtian wait then for "the deſire of all nations[s]," as the devout Iſraelite of old did for the "conſolation of Iſrael[t];" let him wait in full aſſurance, that "the myſtery of God ſhall be finiſhed, as he hath declared to his ſervants the Prophets[u]," and that "all the kingdoms of the

[r] Acts i. 7.
[s] Hagg. ii. 7.
[t] Luke ii. 25.
[u] Rev. x. 7.

earth

earth will become the kingdom of God, and his Chriſt [x];" and, in the mean time, let him recollect, that when the fulneſs of that glorious kingdom is come, happy will that man be, who by the purity of his life, the energy of his precepts, or the prevailing influence of his example, hath contributed in any degree to accelerate its approach.

[x] Rev. xi. 15.

FINIS.

ERRATA.

Pag. 58. l. 2. read *ſureſt*
To note [q], p. 72. add *Hiſt.* v. 5.
Pag. 74. l. 18. dele *fomenting*
133. l. 4. read *their*
135. l. 20. read *who*
146. l. 9. read *revived*
160. l. 20. read *ſolicit*
—— l. 21. read *triumphant*
211. l. 5. read *yoke*
222. l. 24. read *of worſhip*
226. note [d], read *See Joſeph. Antiqq.* lib. xi. c. 13.